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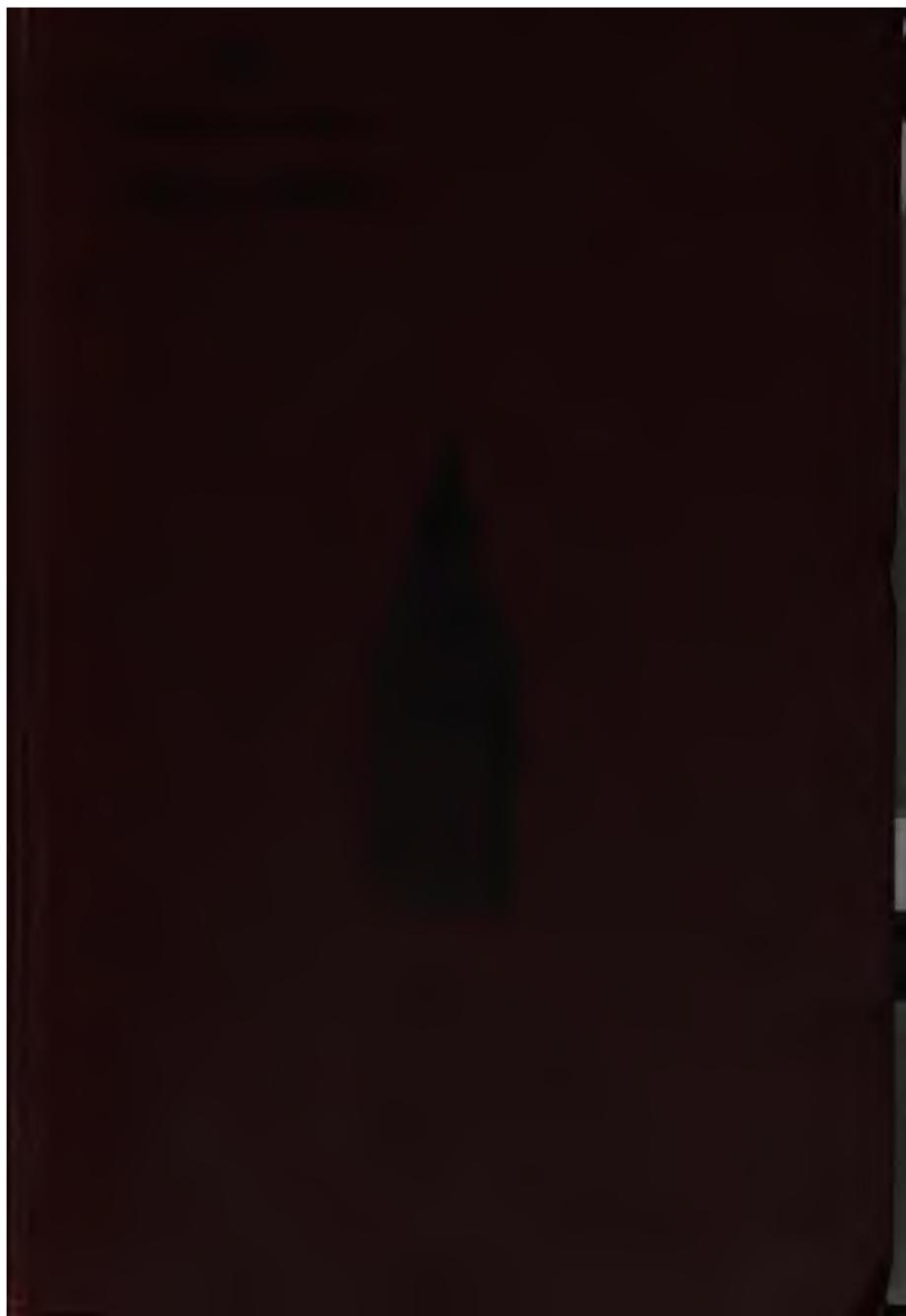
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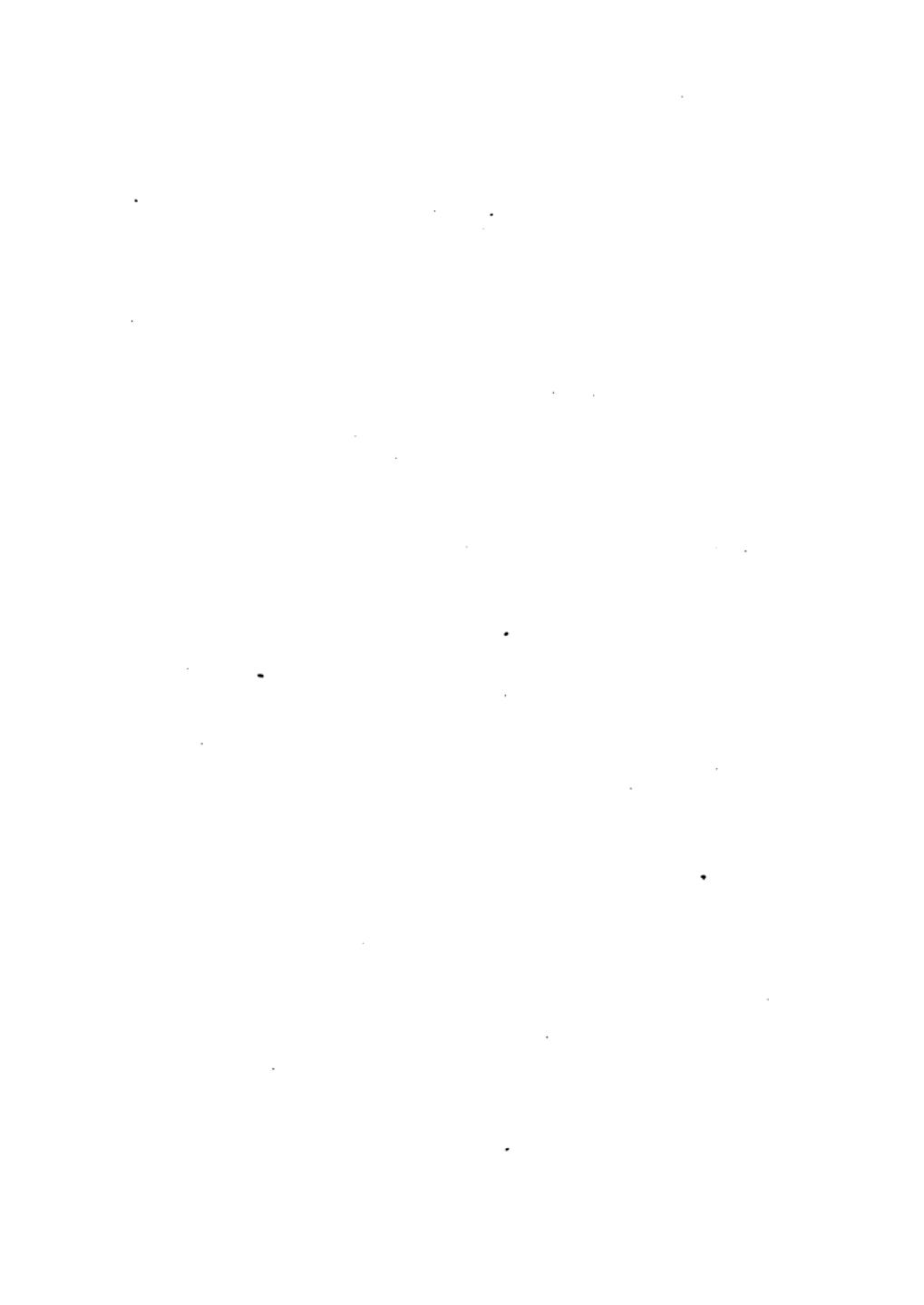
THE WESTMINSTER BIOGRAPHIES

ADAM DUNCAN

BY

H. W. WILSON







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*The photogravure used as a frontispiece
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PREFACE.

In this brief sketch of the great commander who can be ranked after only Nelson amongst his contemporaries, a certain amount of space has been devoted to the social condition of the navy during the time of his service. This is necessary, even within such narrow limits of space, as otherwise misleading ideas might be formed concerning Duncan's character. His refusal, for instance, upon two occasions to go to the West Indies, when the Monarch and Blenheim were ordered there, might lead men to conclude that he was an officer who spared himself. It is not till we understand under what sanitary conditions he had passed his early years at sea that we, who are accustomed to regard life in the navy of our own day as healthier, if anything, than life on shore, can realise that in the middle of the eighteenth century most constitutions were wrecked by it, not till we turn to the lurid pages of Smollett or the

dustier records of Beatson that we learn what West Indian service meant. It could be faced by only the young or healthy, and even by them rarely with impunity. Not until quite the close of the eighteenth century was there a real and sensible improvement in the matter of sanitation on ship-board.

A few details, as yet unpublished, from the navy records in the Record Office, have been embodied in the account of the Nore mutiny, though this work makes no pretence at originality. The author must acknowledge his great indebtedness to the Earl of Camperdown's admirable biography of his great ancestor, where is collected all the material that remains for a biography of the admiral, with the exception of the logs, journals, and correspondence which are to be found in the Record Office. These have been examined, but they yield little that is new or important. Unfortunately, in Duncan's case, no such correspondence is preserved as fills the seven volumes of Nicolas's

Despatches and Letters of Lord Nelson. *Very few papers or letters dealing with the private life and personality of the admiral survive. We have no record of his thoughts and opinions. Consequently, he is a somewhat shadowy figure; and there is difficulty in reconstructing his character. A singular fatality, indeed, seems to have pursued his letters. His intimate correspondence with the great Lord Spencer, which would have been of priceless value, perished many years ago.*

H. W. WILSON.

CHRONOLOGY.

1731.

July 1. Adam Duncan was born in Dundee.

1746.

April. Sailed on his first cruise in the *Tryal* sloop, under his cousin, Commander R. Haldane.

1747.

November. Transferred to the *Shoreham* sloop.

1748.

February 24. His first action, attempting to cut out a French privateer at Belle-isle.

1749.

January. Midshipman on board the *Centurion*, under Captain, the Hon. A. Keppel, commodore in command of the Mediterranean station.

1751.

Returns to England when the *Centurion* is paid off. Unemployed till 1754.

1754.

December 22. Appointed acting lieutenant on board the *Norwich*.

1755.

January 10. Appointment confirmed by the admiralty, and Duncan transferred back to the *Centurion*.

1756.

July 10. Second lieutenant of the *Torbay*, under Keppel.

November. The *Torbay* captures the French frigate, *Chariot Royal*.

1757.

September. The *Torbay* takes part in an unsuccessful attack upon the Isle of Aix.

October–November. She captures several prizes and the privateer *Rustan*.

1758.

December 29. Wounded in the leg in the *Torbay's* attack upon Goree.

1759.

September 21. Promoted commander.

CHRONOLOGY xiii

1759 (*continued*)

October 1. First independent command
of *Royal Exchange*, armed ship.

1761.

February 25. Promoted captain and ap-
pointed to the *Valiant*.

March 29. Sails to attack Belleisle.

June 7. Belleisle captured.

1762.

March 2. Sails on the Havana expedition.

July 30. Leads the storming party
against the Morro.

1764.

June 26. The *Valiant* paid off. Unem-
ployed till 1778.

1774.

Visits Italy.

1777.

Marries Henrietta Dundas.

1778.

May 16. Appointed to the *Suffolk*.

December 4. Transferred to the *Monarch*.

1779.

September 2-3. With Admiral Hardy's fleet retreats before a superior Franco-Spanish force.

January 16. Takes part in the defeat of Langara's fleet; captures the *San Augustin*.

1781.

Ordered to the West Indies. Is obliged by his health to resign command of the *Monarch*.

1782.

March. Appointed to command the *Blenheim*.

October 21. Takes part in Howe's action with the Spaniards off Cape Spartel.

November. Resigns command on the *Blenheim*, being ordered to the West Indies.

1783.

January 15. Appointed to the *Foudroyant*.

April 1. Transferred to the *Edgar* for three years.

CHRONOLOGY

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1787.

September 24. Promoted rear-admiral.

1793.

February 3. Promoted vice-admiral.

1795.

February. Appointed to command the North Sea fleet. Hoists his flag in the *Venerable*.

June. Promoted admiral.

Summer. Offered and declines the Mediterranean command.

1796.

October. Unsuccessful attempt on the Texel.

1797.

April 30. Mutiny in the *Venerable* suppressed.

May 13. Mutiny in the *Adamant* suppressed.

May 28. Sails for the Texel. Deserted by all his fleet except the *Adamant* and *Venerable*.

May 30. Blockades the Texel with these two ships.

b

1797 (*continued*)

June 12. Joined by a Russian squadron.

June 14. Collapse of the Nore mutiny.

October 11. Defeats the Dutch fleet at Camperdown.

October 17. Created Viscount Duncan of Camperdown.

December 20. Takes part in the solemn thanksgiving for naval victories.

1799.

August 30. Dutch fleet in the Helder captured by a joint expedition.

1800.

March. Decides to retire.

April. Strikes his flag.

1801.

January. Offers his services against the Northern Coalition.

1804.

July. Again offers his services.

August 4. Dies at Coldstream on his way home from London, *aet.* 73.

ADAM DUNCAN



ADAM DUNCAN.

ADAM DUNCAN, the future admiral and founder of the noble house of Camperdown, came into the world at a time when the fortunes of his country seemed at their lowest ebb. He was born on July 1, 1731, when George II. had been but four years on the throne, when there were still old people who could remember the rule of Cromwell, when the union of Scotland with England was only a recent memory, and when the question which of the two dynasties, Stuart or Hanoverian, was to govern Great Britain, was far from being irrefutably settled. In his own lifetime, which was not immoderately long, since it did not attain to the fourscore years of the Psalmist, he saw the final choice made. The momentous decision between a policy of continental and colonial expansion was reached by this country. He was a boy when the seventy years'

struggle with France opened, in which he played so splendid a part and which finally ended in the establishment of the British Empire ; his manhood saw England at, it might seem, the summit of glory ; his advancing years witnessed her fall, but her fall not without honour ; his old age saw her triumph once more, though his eyes closed forever on the world before the final defeat of Napoleon. And thus his life covers the most interesting and the most stirring period of our history,—an epoch of romance and adventure and hard fighting and heroism rarely or never to be surpassed, the adolescence of our modern empire, as the “spacious times” of Queen Elizabeth were the adolescence of the smaller unit of the nation.

It is strange to contrast our own more peaceful century with this turbulent and stormy age. Between 1731 and 1804, which years limit the term of Duncan's life, England was at war from

1739 to 1748, from 1756 to 1763, from 1775 to 1783, from 1793 to 1801, and through 1803 and 1804. That is to say through nearly one-half of the period the nation's energies were centred upon war. The struggles of these times were all the more terrible, inasmuch as they were protracted over long years, and inasmuch as the utter absence of such a thing as sanitary knowledge inflicted the most fearful sufferings upon the combatants. Thousands died in battle, tens of thousands of fever and pestilence and scurvy, till the death-roll of the nations struggling for world-power attained ghastly proportions.

The union of Scotland with England had abolished the dualism which had tied England's hands at many critical seasons, and admitted Scotland and Scotsmen to a full share in the trade and exploitation of the empire. It gave to England a new strength, gradually identifying with her interests a race of

unexampled courage, tenacity, and business insight, which has written its glories in red on every field where Englishmen and Scotsmen have fought side by side. Hateful at first to Scotland, the union ended by giving her wealth and prosperity and something more. For, if it be said to-day that England rules the world, it is also said that Scotsmen rule England. The sacrifice of nationality was wisely and rightly made. The day of small and weak nations had passed.

When Duncan saw the light at Dundee, the era of prosperity for Scotland had as yet hardly begun. The soreness generally felt in the country at the union aided and abetted the efforts of the Jacobites, who were everywhere numerous and powerful. The Georges were regarded as foreign sovereigns, who knew little or nothing of Scotland and probably cared less. They never visited or showed the smallest interest in their northern kingdom. But the Pretender

was still remembered. Only fifteen years before Duncan's birth he had lodged in the very place wherein the admiral was born. He was of Scotch descent, and he had all the Stuart grace of manner. Quite apart from this, the deep and passionate loyalty of the Highlander chiefs and tribes to the man whom they regarded as the representative of their anointed king earned their support the moment he showed himself.

All men in Scotland had to take one side or the other, for faction ran high. The house of Duncan, however, as Lowlanders who did not love the memory of the Stuarts, were strong Whigs, and supporters of the Georges. The admiral had two elder brothers, in both of whom the spirit of adventure asserted itself. John went to India, and died far away from Dundee, in China, before he had made a name. Alexander entered the army in the terrible times of Culloden ; and, if he did not climb to the sum-

mits of glory, yet earned a solid reputation as a man of capacity, learning, and courage. Adam, youngest of the trio, entered the navy in 1746, at the age of fifteen.

Little or nothing remains of his early life. Though of the four great naval victories which were won by the British fleet in the final war with France, one stands to his credit,—the other three ranking amongst the achievements of the immortal Nelson,—no pious chronicler in his own lifetime gathered up the scattered fragments of his story when the people yet lived who remembered him and who could have told of him. No such records of his early days survive as survive in the case of Nelson. He attained greatness only in his old age ; and even then it was his hard fate for the fame of Camperdown to be swallowed up in the yet more brilliant glories of the Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar, while men were only too eager

to forget the story of the great mutiny. It has been left for after generations, seeing events in their true perspective, to mark the splendours of his work and to collect what scattered wreckage of his history floats on the sea of time.

Duncan's first ship was the wretched little sloop *Tryal*, a cockle-shell of one hundred and forty-two tons, mounting eight carriage guns and six swivels. Her complement did not probably exceed seventy men and boys. She was commanded by his cousin, Robert Haldane. In these small vessels the conditions of life were usually miserable both for officers and men. The ship would be very wet, and there was very little space below. Lord Dundonald, who commanded the *Speedy*, of one hundred and fifty-eight tons, a vessel of much the same size, tells us that his cabin was only five feet high, and that, to shave, he had to remove the skylight and put his head through. Presumably, Duncan, when he joined the ship, did so

as a captain's servant. Officers in those days were allowed to take a certain number of young relatives or retainers with them to sea, and these were generally rated as servants. They filled much the same place as the modern naval cadet.

The *Tryal* was despatched from Sheerness to Leith, where Duncan went on board her. She had charge of a convoy of transports, conveying stores and re-enforcements to the troops then engaged in stamping out the Jacobite rebellion. While she was at sea, the decisive battle of Culloden was fought, and the hopes of the Young Pretender crushed for ever. She proceeded to cruise off the west coast of Scotland with the object of preventing Prince Charlie's escape, but failed in this. After weeks and months of dull and dreary cruising, she at last got back to Plymouth in the autumn of 1747.

If we wish to know what service in the navy was like at this time, we have only

to go to the pages of Smollett and Edward Thompson. So much of the great period of Duncan's life is filled with his dealings with the mutineers that it will be well to note even at this early date the causes at work which ultimately produced the great explosion of 1797. Smollett wrote from the standpoint of the warrant officer,— for such the surgeon was in these days,— but he wrote with a very considerable knowledge of the navy, having himself served in Sir Challoner Ogle's expedition to the West Indies, of 1740 and 1741. Though a novelist, he is a realist rather than a romancer, and can generally be trusted. Thompson was a captain in the navy, of good reputation and service. He wrote of a later period than Smollett, but in broad outline the two descriptions coincide.

What is most striking in Smollett's narrative is the absolute impunity with which the caprices of captains could be

gratified. Officers of the lower ratings could be put in irons, and men barbarously punished or even killed, without, it would seem, the smallest account being afterwards demanded from the captain. There was no redress, and consequently the miseries of the seamen under a brutal officer must have been extreme. The food on board was filthily bad.

Our provisions [says the hero of Smollett's story] consisted of putrid salt beef, to which the sailors gave the name of Irish horse; salt pork of New England, which, though neither fish nor flesh, savoured of both; bread from the same country, every biscuit whereof, like a piece of clockwork, moved by its own internal impulse, occasioned by the myriads of insects that dwelt within it; and butter served out by the gill, that tasted like train oil thickened with salt. Instead of small beer, each man was allowed three half-quarters of brandy or rum, which were distributed every morning.

In an age when the secret of distilling water had been forgotten, and all the ship's supply had to be carried in hogsheads and butts, the water was usually

foul and putrid. In the expedition of 1741 against Carthagena,—in a tropical climate,—only one quart a day was allowed each man for all purposes. That is to say, the whole complement of a large fleet was subjected to the daily and hourly torture of thirst.

With such food and such water, it is scarcely to be wondered at that any fleet which kept the sea for any time became sickly, or that thousands of men were swept away by fever and scurvy. Not many years before Duncan's entrance into the navy, Admiral Hosier, in the West Indies, with a fleet the complement of which reached only 4,750 men, lost in two years four thousand officers and men. Ten years later the *Stirling Castle*, with a total crew of 480, after a few months' cruise in the Channel, returned to port with only 160 fit for duty. Anson's squadron, on his famous voyage round the world, was in such a state when it reached Juan Fernandez that in the

Centurion only twenty men out of four hundred could be mustered for work. In this ship "they buried four, five, and sometimes six men a day." Even Boscowen's fleet, in 1755, was depleted by "jail fever," a form of virulent typhus, due to disregard of the most elementary sanitary rules. Upwards of two thousand seamen died of the distemper. Far later returns speak eloquently of the unnecessary and preventable waste of life which occurred in the British fleet. Between 1774 and 1780, 175,990 men were raised for the navy, of whom only 1,243 were slain in action; while no less than 18,541 died of sickness, and 42,000 deserted. In the war of 1756-63, 184,893 men were raised; and, though only 1,512 fell in battle, but 49,673 men remained at the close of the struggle. The others had melted away through disease and desertion. These stupefying figures give us a better idea of the miseries and hardships of the seaman's lot

than even Smollett's ghastly picture, painted with the *sæva indignatio* of the man of letters and science.

The most terrible feature of the time was the suffering of the sick and the wounded. The ship of the line's hospital, or sick-bay is thus described by Smollett :—

Here I saw about fifty miserable, distempered wretches, suspended in rows, so huddled one upon another that not more than fourteen inches' space was allotted for each with his bed and bedding, and deprived of the light of the day as well as of fresh air, breathing nothing but a noisome atmosphere of the morbid steam exhaling from their own excrements and diseased bodies, devoured with vermin hatched in the filth that surrounded them, and destitute of every convenience necessary for people in that helpless condition.

There is plenty of evidence to show that this picture was not exaggerated ; and there is good reason to think that Captain Oakum, the inhuman tyrant, who declared that he would have no sick men in his ship, flogged the

sufferers from fever, sent the dropsical aloft, and compelled those who spat blood to work at the pumps, really existed. Indeed, no sacredness attached to the lives of human beings—provided they were not of rank—in these days. Like the Turkish army, which in the 1897 campaign saw no use in wounded men, and therefore did not trouble itself about them, the British navy of the middle eighteenth century never concerned itself with the sick or suffering. They might rot or starve for all it cared.

The discipline seems to have been as miserable as the sanitation. In Roderick Random's ship, when anything happens, the officers and men run confusedly to and fro, hallooing and shouting. The ships were crammed with jailbirds, smugglers, and poachers, or sometimes, when there was especial want of men, the admiralty, with exquisite humour, sent on board sick and debilitated

Greenwich pensioners. If these died, the country was saved the cost of their pensions. If they lived through it all, they were proved malingerers. It was like the dilemma which beset the unhappy woman accused of witchcraft,—and only four years before Duncan's birth a woman was burnt in Scotland for witchcraft,—if she floated on a pond, she was guilty, and was burnt at the stake : if she sank, she was innocent, but was, unfortunately, drowned. As for the officers, Thompson gives us this beautiful picture of the lieutenant of 1758–63 : “A chaw of tobacco, a rattan [with which to belabour the laggards among the men], and a rope of oaths were sufficient qualifications to constitute a lieutenant”; but he notes that since then a great improvement had taken place.

At a time when any affectation of devotion to the interests of the country or the navy was laughed at as hypocrisy ; when corruption was everywhere rampant,

under rulers who in no sense stirred or appealed to the finer qualities which then, as always, were to be found in the hearts of Englishmen; when Horace Walpole wrote that, if the Pretender came, England would look on and say, “Fight, dog ! fight, bear !” when Henry Fox could say, “England is for the first-comer”; when the watchword of the squires was, “If the French come, I'll pay, but devil take me if I'll fight,” — it is little wonder that men showed themselves the cowards and knaves every one pretended to think them. In no other period of our naval history are the instances of misconduct, or even gross cowardice in action, so many and so painful. After every great battle there was a rich crop of courts-martial on captains or admirals who would not “go down to the fight.” After the battle of Toulon, in 1744, the captains of the *Dorsetshire*, *Royal Oak*, *Rupert*, *Chichester*, *Boyne*, and *Essex*, were all pun-

ished for misconduct, where they did not abscond or die on their way home. The two admirals quarrelled, and failed to support each other ; and they also were brought to trial, when the senior officer, who was probably the less guilty of the two, was cashiered. The first lieutenant of a British ship of forty guns was shot for cowardice in surrendering to a French privateer. Superior British squadrons in one instance, under Peyton, in the East Indies, in 1746, got out of the enemy's way ; or in another instance, under Captain Mitchell, of the *Lenox*, remained in presence of the inferior enemy, and dared not close and fight a decisive action. Captain Mitchell's only punishment was a fine and dismissal from the service. Last and more famous of all was Byng's weak action at Minorca, which was most terribly punished, though, certainly, his conduct had been far less reprehensible than that of many of the officers mentioned above.

With this sort of spirit abroad in the navy, there is little wonder that British successes were few and far between, and disgraceful reverses all too common. Quarrels and discussions between the army and navy occurred, whenever the two forces attempted to co-operate. At Cartagena, at Santiago de Cuba, at Quiberon, such disputes, when combined with the usual slackness of either service at this time, issued in unsuccess, and wasted the lives of hundreds of British soldiers or seamen.

Yet, in spite of this rottenness upon the surface, the navy and the nation were sounder than might have been supposed. If there were plenty of Captain Oakums and Captain Whiffles, there were men of the stamp of Boscawen and Hawke, waiting patiently to do the work when their time should come, and when the incompetence of the lordlings and men of influence who engrossed the most profitable commands

should be discovered by some master mind. The nation was neither so cowardly nor so weak as the pessimists strove to represent it. It only waited for the coming of a man. And, when the first and greatest Pitt—the one British statesman since Cromwell who has thoroughly understood the use of a navy—attained to power, it was seen of what great things the race was capable, well and bravely led.

Duncan was, fortunately, saved from the corrupting influence of his times. He came from a small and remote Scotch country town, where men still worshipped God, and where it was not the first and greatest requisite to “trifle well,” and live an infamous life. He saw, in all probability, the best side of the service. He was, for the most part, in his early days, either under his own family connections, who would naturally temper for him the asperities of sailor life, or under distinguished officers, such

as Keppel, who were of aristocratic descent, but yet were keen on the service, and with whom, we may conjecture, his family had interest. Yet even for the officers, who had far better food than the seamen and who were not, like them, packed into the merest fraction of space between decks, the life was very trying. Few of our admirals of this period endured much service at sea without contracting disease ; and the subordinate officers in stations such as the West Indies died very fast,—a fact to which, in later days, Horatio Nelson owed, in great part, his rapid promotion.

Throughout his life Duncan was noted for three things,—his gigantic stature, his grace of person and of character, and his unaffected piety. In all that we see or read of him he was one of the most lovable of men. And what he was in old age, when he became famous, that surely he was in youth, when he was yet obscure. A certain want of fine breed-

ing, as Admiral Colomb has pointed out, marked Nelson, as it marked Napoleon, probably because in Nelson's case he did not associate with many of his equals in his youth, but served in a small ship during the early years of his life. There is no trace of this in Duncan. From first to last he was courtly, dignified, at his ease. Wherever he went, his tall, handsome figure attracted attention. When walking through the streets of Chatham as a young man, it is said crowds came out of their houses and followed him for the mere pleasure of looking upon one so comely of form.

From the *Tryal*, Duncan passed with his cousin to the *Shoreham*, a small frigate of twenty guns, none of calibre above the nine-pounder. Such craft, in those days, did the work which is done by our modern protected cruisers. They scouted, guarded commerce, and looked after the enemy's cruisers. They were small and weak ships, and, as their

unfitness for hard work at sea was realised, were gradually replaced by larger vessels of thirty-two guns and thirty-six guns, firing a far heavier broadside.

Early in 1748 the *Shoreham* put to sea to cruise at the entrance of the Channel and in *the Bay*; in other words, the Bay of Biscay. She pretty quickly had fighting to do. In January and February she captured a Brest ship; sent in her boats at Belleisle to cut out a privateer, and failed in this enterprise, though her men had the satisfaction of destroying the enemy's vessel; retook a French prize, and captured the *Valeur*, a privateer of sixteen guns. In wars with France the chops of the Channel always swarmed with privateers, English or French, which preyed upon merchantmen, but gave a wide berth, when they could, to men-of-war. At this date the shipping trade of France was still considerable and flourishing, so that the losses to commerce were generally

very evenly distributed between England and her neighbour. In the spring the *Shoreham* joined Admiral Hawke's squadron, and returned with him to Plymouth when peace was made. There she ran aground, but was got off and put out of commission.

Here Duncan's service with his cousin ended. Still a midshipman, he was entered on board the *Centurion*, fifty, Captain The Hon. Augustus Keppel, in 1749, whose interest had somehow or other been enlisted in his cause, and who seems henceforward to have worked in every way to advance him. In her he made an uneventful cruise to Algiers and the Mediterranean, returning in 1751, and then for three years passed his time ashore, as there was nothing doing in the navy, and no attempt was made to keep up a large force of officers and men in time of peace. In 1754, however, Keppel once more went to sea, as commodore of the North Amer-

ican station, in the *Centurion*, and seized the opportunity of a vacancy in the *Norwich*, which accompanied him, to appoint Duncan as acting lieutenant in her. The commission was confirmed. Thus, at the age of twenty-three, he reached that position in the service which Nelson, the favourite of fortune, attained at eighteen. Duncan, however, had no such powerful influence behind him as supported the young Nelson and carried him rapidly to captain's rank. Nelson was a captain at twenty, Duncan only at thirty. Nelson obtained his flag as rear-admiral at thirty-eight, Duncan not till he was fifty-six.

The cruise of the *Centurion*, to which ship Duncan had been almost at once transferred from the *Norwich*, was on this occasion as uninteresting as before, except that he must have witnessed the disembarkation of the unfortunate General Braddock's force. Re-

turning to England after Keppel, Duncan followed him on board the *Torbay*, seventy-four, which ship cruised with Hawke's fleet on the outbreak of war with France, blockading Brest and Rochefort. She captured many prizes, amongst others the French frigate *Chariot Royal*, of thirty-six guns, and then returned to Spithead for the court-martial on Byng. Through the spring and summer of 1757 the *Torbay* was with the Channel fleet ; and she was one of the ships which conveyed Sir John Mordaunt's unlucky expedition to the Isle of Aix. The lion-hearted Wolfe, the future conqueror of Quebec, sailed with the troops, and urged action in vain upon his general. Little was attempted, nothing done ; and the nation was deeply irritated at a discreditable failure. But, before success could be achieved in these conjoint expeditions, it was necessary to place at the head of the soldiers officers who were something

more than hide-bound pedants or court favourites. Pitt quickly grasped the fact. Mordaunt was a serviceable warning to him.

There is little need to dilate on the *Torbay's* service. What Duncan did on board her we can never know : what she did we can only learn from the bare outlines of her log. Constant slight brushes with the enemy's cruisers, the loss from time to time of a mast or spar, the capture of a hostile cruiser or two, and a cutting out expedition now and then were the most striking incidents of her cruise. A chapter of any of Marryat's sea novels will fill in the picture. The excitement was varied by the explosion of her fore-magazine at Spithead on August 27, 1758 ; but both Keppel and Duncan escaped with their lives, and the ship, it would seem, was not very seriously damaged, since she was speedily at sea again. Keppel was after this placed in charge of a small

conjoint expedition, to capture the French settlement of Goree on the west coast of Africa. In the attack upon the place Duncan, now first lieutenant of the *Torbay*, received his first and only wound in action. He was shot in the leg, but the injury was not serious. The *Torbay* returned to England, to service with the Channel fleet, as before ; and late in 1759 Duncan was promoted commander and given command of a most unpromising craft, the *Royal Exchange*. This vessel was simply an armed merchantman, and, like the auxiliary cruisers of the American line in the Spanish-American War, kept her own merchant crew on board. Many of her men were foreigners, others of the crew were boys, all were undisciplined ; and Duncan got quit of her as speedily as he could, and was unemployed for some months.

In 1761 he went back to Keppel, but now as flag-captain of the flagship

Valiant, and shared in the successful expedition to Belleisle. Then in 1762 the *Valiant* sailed with Albemarle and Pocock on a conjoint expedition, to try a stroke upon Havana, as Spain had joined France against us. Duncan personally superintended the disembarkation of the army, and probably directed the service of the battery constructed ashore by the seamen of the *Valiant*, and known as the “*Valiant's* battery.” When a breach was made in the walls of the Morro, he led his men through it, armed only with a stick, and on the surrender of the place burnt two Spanish ships of the line on the stocks and took possession of nine others. The expedition must have been very profitable to a comparatively poor man, as he was, since he received £1,600 as prize money. The admiral in command drew no less than £122,000, while the unhappy seamen had to be content with £3 14s. 10d. each. Although at this period it was

one of the common seaman's grievances that, while he risked his life just as much as his superior officer, he received an absurdly small share of prize money, yet his complaint was not redressed till well on in the present century.

On her way to Jamaica the *Valiant* made several rich captures, and then, as peace was proclaimed, returned home. Once more Duncan was sentenced to a long period of inactivity ashore, passing fourteen uneventful years in the flower of his age upon half-pay. In this period he spent several years at Bath or Cheltenham, visited Italy, and married a wife, Miss Dundas, niece of the future Lord Melville, the colleague of the second Pitt.

In 1778 a fresh war with France began; and Duncan received command of the *Monarch*, a vessel of the line of seventy-four guns, and in her served with the Channel fleet. He had the

painful duty of sitting in a court-martial which tried his old friend and superior, Keppel, for a lamentably inconclusive battle in the Channel. The misfortune arose really from the absurd fighting orders of the time, which compelled squadrons to form in line of battle for action, and allowed an enemy to get away while they were forming. Duncan's action in after life at Camperdown showed that he, at least, could disdain this pedantry. Keppel was acquitted triumphantly ; and then his second in command, Palliser, was tried for misconduct, and also cleared.

At this date the British navy was badly handled and in want of a great admiral. Duncan was there ; but perhaps his high capacity was as yet unknown, and his connection with Keppel, a strong Whig, may have stood him in bad stead with a furiously partisan Tory ministry. Commands were handed over to aged or mediocre officers, with the

most indifferent result. Howe, a good, if not superlative, admiral, was driven in disgust from his command. Hood, by far the best of the men high up in the navy, and really a great and capable leader, was not afforded an opening. Rodney, who was inferior in most respects to Hood, but who could deal with lazy subordinates in the masterful fashion of St. Vincent, was the one exception amongst the admirals employed from 1778 to 1782, and at least won battles. Yet even he did not follow up his one great victory, as a Nelson, a Hood, or a Duncan, would have followed it up. The consequences of this failure to prefer merit to rank and age were disastrous to the nation. There is reason to think that the revolted colonies could easily have been subdued, had the British forces on sea and land been properly handled, and that Spain and Holland, perhaps even France, would never then have joined against us in the war. It is

all the more melancholy to reflect that there were plenty of capable officers in the navy, had the rulers of this country cared to take the trouble to search for merit and capacity.

Under an aged and an ailing admiral the *Monarch* cruised with the Channel fleet, and in the summer of 1779 with this fleet ran from a combined French and Spanish Armada. The sight filled two officers, at least, in the British fleet, with indignation. Jervis, the future Lord St. Vincent, and Duncan both raged inwardly ; and it is possible that, had either of them been in command, the decisive battle of the war would have been fought then and there. But the odds were grievously heavy,—thirty-eight ships against sixty-six, a far greater disproportion than any British admiral in recent times has confronted with success. It was expected that the allied fleet would cover the passage of an army of invasion, so that the peril to England

was extreme. But, strangely enough, it did nothing except cruise aimlessly for a few days in the Channel, and then disperse.

After this dismal experience the *Monarch* went out with Rodney to Gibraltar, and with him took part in the complete defeat of a Spanish squadron under Langara, on January 16, 1780. Duncan was very hotly engaged with three of the enemy's ships of the line; and one of the three struck to him, but from the heavy sea could not be secured, and escaped. In this action, of eleven Spanish ships of the line, four were taken, four blown up, sunk, or driven ashore, and only three escaped. But then as now the Spaniards were a contemptible enemy at sea; and it was commonly said, "A Spanish ship chased is a Spanish ship taken," in so little respect was the Spanish navy held by British seamen.

From the relief of Gibraltar, for which purpose Rodney had been sent out, Dun-

can in the *Monarch* returned to Channel service ; but presently, his ship being ordered off to the unhealthy station of the West Indies, where twenty years before his constitution had been grievously impaired, and his doctor advising him under no circumstances to return to the tropics, he resigned his command, and was unemployed for nearly a year. It is clear that the admiralty did not regard his action with disfavour, since he was in March, 1782, appointed to a better vessel than the *Monarch*, the ship of the line *Blenheim*, of ninety guns. In her he sailed with Howe's fleet to the second relief of Gibraltar, now closely pressed and in sore straits. The work of escorting out a large convoy of slow-sailing victuallers and transports Howe managed admirably.

On the fleet's return, upon October 20, in the neighbourhood of Cape Trafalgar,—soon to be far more famous,—there was a sharp brush with a supe-

rior Franco-Spanish squadron, the *Victory* on this day, as twenty-three years later, carrying the flag of the British commander-in-chief. The *Blenheim* was one of the ships most hotly engaged, and suffered some loss. On her return to England she was ordered out to the West Indies ; and Duncan quitted her, receiving at the time a letter of the most complimentary tone from Howe. He then was appointed to the *Foudroyant*, a still finer ship, but only for a few weeks, as after the conclusion of peace in January, 1783, she was paid off. He passed from her to the Portsmouth guardship *Edgar*, which he commanded through three uneventful years, and then in the autumn of 1787 was promoted rear-admiral.

It will not have escaped the reader that, though Duncan served well and faithfully through this his third war, no great exploit comparable with Nelson's wearing from the line at St. Vincent stands against his name. But, if the facts

are carefully scrutinised, it will be found that he was singularly unfortunate in his lack of opportunities. No real chance of making a name came to him. The government of the day was not quick to discern and employ the most enterprising men in the navy. No "organiser of victory" in the shape of Lord Spencer had yet revealed himself, to rise above seniority. And, if the administration of the navy had been run upon the same lines during the final struggle with France, it is probable that Nelson would have come down to us as nothing more than a dashing junior officer. From 1787 to 1795, the third year of the war with France, Duncan remained on land unemployed, rising automatically by seniority in the interval from rear-admiral to vice-admiral. The only fact which is recorded of him in this interval is that he intervened in a riot in Edinburgh to protect his wife's mother, Mrs. Dundas, who from the

close connection of the Dundas family with Pitt's Tory government was specially obnoxious to the Scotch Radicals. On this occasion Duncan had his little finger badly broken. When war with France began in 1793, he could not obtain a command, in spite of strenuous efforts which he is known to have made and in spite of his marriage relations with the close friend of the prime minister, which were of more importance, perhaps, in those days than the supremest capacity where place was an object.

Fortunately for this country, at the close of 1794 Lord Spencer succeeded Lord Chatham as first lord of the admiralty. The six years through which this great man had the direction of our navy are amongst the most splendid in British history. He made it his task to seek out and employ talent. Sir John Jervis was sent out to the Mediterranean under him; under him Nelson was

given his first independent command, which issued in the magnificent victory of the Nile; under him Duncan was at last appointed to the North Sea fleet. "What can be the reason," he is said to have asked, "that 'Keppel's Duncan' has never been brought forward?" As there was no answer to this question except the explanation that Duncan's merits had been overlooked, the admiral was in February, 1795, given charge of the North Sea fleet, the third station in point of importance, the other two being the Mediterranean and the Channel.

The circumstances which required the presence of a strong squadron in the North Sea were these. In the course of 1794 Holland had been conquered by the French troops, the Prince of Orange driven from his dominions, a disorderly republic of the French type under French protection established in the country, and the Dutch navy

added to the forces of France. As this navy included thirty-seven ships of the line—all, it is true, of small size—and forty-four frigates, transferred from the coalition against France to the new French coalition against England, this was a serious embarrassment and danger. Three of the Dutch warships were seized in British ports on the outbreak of war with Holland. Most of the others were concentrated in the Texel, the deeper of the entrances to the Zuyder Zee. But as yet only three or four of the Dutch ships of the line were in a condition to take the sea. It was Duncan's task to watch these ships closely and prevent their leaving port, to blockade the Dutch coast and cut off all the Dutch trade. Being a nation which subsisted upon commerce, the Hollanders might be brought to book by this method of pressure. Duncan sailed for his station in the *Venerable*, seventy-four, in February. He had a very scratch force under his

orders. The *Venerable* was a vessel built for war ; but two of his ships of the line, of fifty-six and fifty-four guns respectively, were converted East India-men, weak in scantling, not stoutly timbered, and none too seaworthy. They did not, however, draw much water ; and light draught was a prime necessity for operations in the shallows of the Dutch coast. Besides these unpromising craft, he had one sixty-four-gun ship, two frigates, and some luggers and cutters. His squadron was constantly changing ; for, whenever vessels were required for other stations or for convoy duty, they were withdrawn from his command of necessity, inasmuch as the British navy was now sorely taxed by the struggle. He was stripped of frigates ; yet the spirit of Nelson in 1805 — “I am not come forth to find difficulties, but to remove them” — breathed in his heart, and, though he may at times have remonstrated, he never fretted. In the summer

he was re-enforced by a Russian fleet of twelve sail of the line and six frigates, under Vice-Admiral Hanikov and Rear-Admirals Makarov and Tate. Makarov was an ancestor of the distinguished Russian admiral of our own day. Tate was an Englishman, of whom many were at this date to be found in the Russian fleet. Admiral Hanikov was placed under Duncan's orders, nominally ; but the situation was painful and undignified for the British commander-in-chief, and demanded all his tact. Here was he, with a promiscuous collection of British odds and ends, while a powerful and homogeneous Russian force was subordinated to him. Compared with their ships, his cut a lamentable figure. It is true that the battle efficiency of the Russians at this date was by no means high, and that, poor though the British ships might look, they had plenty of fight in them, as was proved at Camperdown. The Russian admiral,

though he seems to have been an excellent and tactful officer at the bottom, had to stand a good deal on his dignity to satisfy the Empress Catherine and appease such opinion as existed in Russia. Hence no end of trouble about such paltry matters as salutes and who should fire the morning gun. Meantime there were reports that the Dutch were on the eve of putting to sea, though their fleet was known to be very ill-manned.

Yet Duncan, whose soul was above petty annoyances, whose one thought was the service of his country, had his whole heart in his work, distasteful though it might seem. The proof of it was in the fact that he declined the most magnificent command that the admiralty had to offer him,—that of the Mediterranean fleet. It was, perhaps, a misfortune both for himself and for his country that he arrived at this decision ; yet few will blame him for resolving to carry through the work that he had in

hand. But in the Mediterranean the chances of distinction were innumerable, the harvest of glory to be reaped exceedingly rich. With his leadership, we may confidently assert, St. Vincent would have been a far more decisive battle than it actually was. Still, Jervis, who ultimately went out and whose claims were pressed by Duncan himself, was certainly the second best of the senior officers in the navy; and he worked wonders.

Duncan was thorough in his work. Insufficient attention has been directed to the skill and seamanship which kept poor, badly manned ships close up to the enemy's ports whenever the wind blew from the east. The blockade of Brest about this time was conducted in a very half-hearted manner by the Channel fleet, which always had the pick of the warships in home waters. But Duncan in his command displayed all the daring which two years later he evinced

in his attack at Camperdown. And the greatness of the performance is enhanced by the fact that the commander-in-chief was not in the flower of age, when bold and decided action comes most naturally to men. He was already old, and his constitution had been wrecked by the terrible climate of the West Indies.

In August, during one of Duncan's absences from his station, to water and refit his ships, the Dutch put to sea. They were seen and watched by the daring little lugger *Spider*; and it was not long before their enemies, in the shape of the British and Russian fleets, were after them. The sortie, however, appears to have been simply for exercise; and they returned to port before they could be brought to battle. But their movements unquestionably made the British government very anxious; and urgent appeals were sent out from Lord Spencer to Duncan to strike a hard blow as soon as possible against them.

It is a startling fact, which illustrates the low quality of the British ships under Duncan, that on this occasion the Russians, though uncoppered and foul, sailed better than their allies.

In October of this year and upon Duncan's station occurred a serious mutiny, which was a premonitory symptom of the extreme discontent existing in the lower ranks of the navy. The battleship *Defiance* was lying in Leith Roads, when on October 18, 1795, a party of seamen rose, flung round-shot about between decks,—a method of showing discontent,—and seized the ship. The foremost guns were loaded and pointed aft towards the officers through loopholes in a barricade of hammocks. The captain, Sir George Home, hearing what had happened, came off from the shore, followed by an armed party from the ship of the line *Asia* in the latter's boats. He was allowed to come on board ; but the armed party were warned off, and

muskets fired at them through the port-holes. The crew broke into the steward's room to get at the grog, and among other mutinous acts snapped a pistol at a steward's mate. A letter was written to the captain, complaining that the men were kept on board like convicts, that they had no liberty, that their grog was heavily watered, and so forth.

They first refused to admit any marines on board,— seemingly there were none in the ship when the mutiny broke out,— and then, with a strong tincture of sedition, suggested that certain of the men who were “Royalists” should be removed when the marines did come on board. They asserted that they were flogged by the officers with “bosun’s-mates’ canes,” and had no hope of redress for their wrongs from the quarter-deck. They wound up by calling themselves a “dutiful ship’s company upon honourable terms.”

Two captains went on board to inquire

into these grievances, and with the aid of the ship's officers and the loyal amongst the crew seized eight of the ringleaders. As the eight, however, were being led over the side to go on board the *Asia*, the mutiny broke out again ; and the prisoners had to be released. Next day troops arrived and forced their way into the ship, though guns were pointed at the boats in which they came, and shot thrown into them, to sink them. Finally, fifteen of the mutineers were brought to trial before a court-martial, and nine sentenced to be hanged, five to receive three hundred lashes with the cat-of-nine-tails, and one one hundred lashes. That the discontent was not confined to the North Sea fleet was proved by the fact that almost simultaneously there were similar outbreaks in the *Windsor Castle*, *Terrible*, and *Culloden* on the Mediterranean station. The truth was that the seamen were in many respects extremely badly used ; and

the French ideas of "liberty, equality, and fraternity," fermenting in many men's minds, accentuated the sense of exasperation. Some seasonable reforms might at this period have averted further mischief; but, unhappily, Lord Spencer and the admiralty board were blind to this internal danger. That Duncan realised the many wrongs of the seaman was clearly shown by his subsequent action in 1797. He is known to have made many representations on their behalf in his private correspondence with Lord Spencer, which unhappily has perished, though possibly even he did not yet understand how threatening the situation was becoming. In the light of these earlier mutinies, however, in which many of the grievances afterwards put forward in the great rising of 1797 were pressed upon the notice of the authorities, it is impossible to pretend, as have some of the historians, that the great explosion came suddenly and without warning.

The winter of 1795 and the early months of 1796 passed in the monotonous blockade of the Texel, Duncan's mainstay still remaining, much to his indignation, the Russian fleet. He complains, and not without reason, that he is the first British admiral that ever was ordered on service with foreigners only. The worst of it was that Russian seamanship was hardly equal to the severe trial of winter cruising. Indeed, a good many British officers roundly declared that this country could have done just as well without the Russians, and thus have saved no small amount of money, since we had, by the terms of our military understanding with Catherine, to victual the eight thousand Russian seamen of the fleet and to keep the eighteen ships in good order.

In the autumn of 1796 the position grew more dangerous for England. The first object of the French in conquering Holland was to facilitate the invasion

of England. It is doubtful whether the cooler heads across the Channel believed in such a scheme, but the fiery Hoche certainly did. The first blow was to be struck at Ireland, with which country the French authorities maintained constant relations and of whose disloyalty they had no substantial doubts. Expeditions were simultaneously to be directed upon that island from the Texel and from Brest. Upon the shore of the Channel the equipment of that flotilla of invasion began, which five years later was to claim Nelson's attention. The Spanish navy was added by alliance to the strength of France and Holland. The danger of the British position was aggravated by a series of bad harvests at home, which led the privy council in the prevailing scarcity to call upon Englishmen to put their households on an allowance of one quartern loaf a head a week, and by a great rise in prices, which bore cruelly upon the poor. The ominous cry

of "Bread and peace!" was heard in the streets.

Anxious to strike a heavy blow at and to disable one at least of their enemies, the British government decided upon an attack on the Island of Texel and an attempt to destroy the Dutch fleet with fire-ships. It was known that the Dutch were extremely discontented with their new masters, and that the Dutch navy was by no means devoted to France. Duncan, however, when the scheme was broached to him, opposed it. To effect anything considerable, a large body of troops must necessarily have been employed; and to disembark and re-embark them upon a storm-swept, harbourless coast, in the face of a vigilant enemy, during the winter months, was a very dangerous enterprise. Lord Spencer reminded the admiral, in words which anticipate his instructions to Nelson before the Nile campaign, of the

fact that risks must be run to achieve great success, and that, if there was failure, it would lie at the doors of the admiralty. This was proper, generous, and high-spirited counsel to give ; and no man could be the worse for such a reminder. Yet Duncan's objections were based upon the exact knowledge which the seaman possesses, and events proved that he was right. He gave the most loyal and hearty support to the scheme of the ministry ; yet it miscarried, not through any fault of his, but through the inevitable malice of circumstances. The failure led him to fear that the ministry would suspect he had acted half-heartedly, and thus pained him the more. He tendered his resignation, but it was very rightly refused.

On this expedition he gave out to his fleet a plan of battle in case he found it practicable to go in and attack the Dutch in the Texel. The plan reveals the tactician behind the man of courage

and of action. Duncan is known to have studied the work of that well-known writer upon tactics, Clerk of Eldin ; for he was not one of those foolish people who believed that a commander-in-chief's one duty in the presence of an enemy was to go at him, no matter how. He saw that there was a right and a wrong way of going at the enemy. His instructions provided for anchoring his own ships by the stern,—a manœuvre of which Nelson availed himself at the Nile and which may have been suggested to him by Duncan's dispositions. It enabled any ship engaged to move forwards or backwards by the simple expedient of shortening in or paying out — veering, that is to say — cable. But what differentiates Duncan's plan from Nelson's is that Duncan does not seem to contemplate the concentration of his whole force upon a detail of the enemy and of so crushing his adversary piece-meal. The superior generalship and

audacity of Nelson enabled him to improve upon Duncan's plan.

For the rest, Duncan, like Nelson, left his captains a free hand in matters of detail. Like Nelson, he had frequent interviews with them, and took care that they should be saturated with his ideas. He does not, however, appear to have entertained as much as did his great junior, who devoted no small part of his income to hospitality in the fleet. Duncan lived, says Captain Hotham who served under him, in a very frugal manner, and kept little state. Having a family dependent upon him and not being a rich man, it was want of money, and not any want of generosity in his disposition, that compelled him to restrict his entertainments. He was, however, of a retiring disposition by nature.

After this unsuccessful expedition, Lord Spencer suggested that it would be best during the severe winter weather

for the main body of the fleet to lie at Yarmouth, which was distant about one hundred and twenty-five miles from the Texel, leaving only light ships, such as cutters and frigates, to watch the proceedings of the enemy, who could now count upon a force of twenty-one ships of the line. The French plan of campaign might be suspected to be this: Two or more of the many blockaded squadrons were to force their way to sea, or seize an opportunity when the blockading fleets were refitting or driven off their station by gales. The French squadrons would then unite at some prearranged rendezvous, and fall upon one of the blockading British fleets before it could be warned. The British plan was to frustrate such a scheme by rendering it impossible for any of the blockaded fleets to put to sea without being promptly brought to action or hotly and closely pursued. The pieces on the chess board — that is to say, the vari-

ous battle squadrons — are thus given by Admiral Colomb for the year 1796. They varied somewhat from day to day.

FRANCE, HOLLAND, AND SPAIN.		ENGLAND AND RUSSIA.	
<i>Battleships.</i>		<i>Battleships.</i>	
Toulon	15	North Sea	26
Cartagena	18	Channel	29
Cadiz	3	Irish coast	2
Ferrol	26	Mediterranean	31
Guarnizo	7	West Indies	20
Brest	21	North America	5
Texel	21	The Cape	8
Newfoundland	7	India.	5
Havana	18		
			126
	136		

Thus, the enemy had a very considerable advantage in numbers, though this was to a great extent neutralised by the divided commands and manifold jealousies which are weaknesses inseparable from an alliance of three powers.

For the escape of the Dutch fleet in the Texel an east wind was a necessity in days when ships had to rely entirely

upon sail power. Consequently, when the wind was from the west, the British blockade could be safely relaxed. The Dutch anxiously watched the weather-cock ; but, when the British fleet was absent, the wind blew steadily from the west, and, when the wind was in the east, Duncan was always off the anchorage. At the close of the year, however, a French expedition did slip out of Brest harbour, owing to the careless watch maintained by Bridport in the Channel ; and, though it achieved nothing, we had to thank fogs and bad weather, and the chapter of accidents generally, and not any acumen on the part of the admiral in charge of the Channel fleet. Moreover, the expedition caused very great uneasiness ; for the discontent of Ireland was perfectly well known in London, and, had any considerable French force landed there, the consequences might have been most disastrous.

All through the winter of 1796-97 this menace of invasion was maintained by the enemy. Large forces were held ready at Brest, at Dunkirk, and at the Texel. The equipment of a flotilla of long boats was pushed steadily forward by the French authorities, and from time to time there were alarms that the enemy had put to sea. Great preparations were made in England to meet the invader on his landing, should he escape the vigilance of our fleets. Every one armed and drilled in the militia, yeomanry, or volunteers. Women and children—and some timorous men—removed from the eastern and southern seaboard, to be safe when the enemy came at last.

In March there was a report that the Dutch were out, and the British fleet at once hurried towards the Texel to meet it. Duncan had been considerably reinforced and could now muster thirteen ships of the line, fourteen frigates, and

nineteen small craft, besides three Russian battleships and five Russian frigates. Unfortunately, the report proved groundless : the Dutch fleet never moved. The wind came round from the east to the west, and Duncan was recalled to Yarmouth.

It was after this fruitless voyage that the great mutiny in the British fleet began. In March, Lord Howe, who was always regarded by the seamen as their trustiest friend, received several petitions from ships in the Channel fleet, urging the need of an increase in the seaman's pay, as, owing to the great rise in the price of food and of the necessities of life which had occurred since the outbreak of war, both the seamen themselves and their wives and families were in terrible penury. They bitterly complained that, while the pay of soldiers and militia had been augmented, the royal navy was forgotten. They protested that they were actuated by no

spirit of sedition or disaffection, but by want. Unhappily, Howe paid no attention to these petitions ; and the next incident was that the Channel fleet at Spithead refused to put to sea. The admiralty were informed by Lord Bridport that it was impossible to use vigorous measures against the mutineers, inasmuch as the whole fleet was concerned.

The word “mutiny” is, perhaps, an anomaly as applied to the state of things now existing in the British fleet, since “mutiny” has associations of violence ; but none as yet was shown to the officers. The men seem to have despaired of obtaining redress for their grievances by any other method than the one adopted. They protested their loyalty to the crown at every juncture, and there is no reason to doubt their protests. A petition was now laid before the admiralty from the seamen, asking for certain definite reforms. It opened with the

sanguine anticipation that the admiralty and nation would

acknowledge our worth and good services both in the American war and this, for which good services your lordship's petitioners do unanimously agree in opinion that their truth to the nation and laborious industry in defence of their king and country deserve some better encouragement than they meet with at present.

The demands were as follows (they are given in Italics to distinguish them from the author's comment) :—

1. *Wages to be raised.* This was simple justice, when the soldiers' pay had been increased, and the price of all necessities had greatly advanced.

2. *Provisions to be of better quality and to be supplied in full weight, sixteen ounces to the pound; bread, and not flour, to be issued in port, and vegetables to be supplied.* It was a great grievance that meat was only served out fourteen ounces to the pound, the other two ounces by a service custom having become the purser's

perquisite. Cheese dwindled down to eleven and two-thirds ounces to the pound. This caused soreness, and led the men to think they were cheated by their officers. It was not unreasonable to ask for fresh bread and vegetables, when circumstances rendered their supply possible. Vegetables were most necessary to health on long cruises.

3. The sick to be better attended to, and their necessaries not to be embezzled by the surgeons. Too often the sick and wounded were left to rot or starve. A report dated March 25, 1797, by the surgeon of the depot-ship and flagship at the Nore, the *Sandwich*, gives a good idea of the state of things prevailing. An "infectious complaint," probably typhus, had broken out on board. The men seized by this complaint, the report proceeds, "are dirty, almost naked, and in general without beds." It is of little avail to prescribe medicines to "unhappy sufferers who are so bare of com-

mon necessities and compelled to mix with the throng by lying on the decks." The number on board was fifteen or sixteen hundred, when there was room, perhaps, for, at the outside, a thousand men. The authorities were warned that, if the number was not lessened, many must fall victims to contagion and disease, and that the situation was replete with anxiety. This was only three weeks before the mutiny began.

4. *Liberty on shore to be given, when possible.* Generally speaking, the men were confined on board, when in port, for fear of desertion; and for years they might never set eyes on their wives and families and homes.

5. *The wounded to receive pay till they recovered or were discharged.* Their pay was stopped when in hospital. In fact, men were punished for their sufferings in their country's service.

6. *These and other grievances to be redressed.* Many complaints were made

by the crews of tyranny and brutality on the part of individual officers. The tales of one captain's doings, who was strenuously denounced for his ill-treatment of his men, recall Smollett's Captain Oakum. Another committed suicide because the admiralty would not receive him. Investigation was afterwards made as to the justice of these complaints ; and, while some were capricious and unjustifiable, the great majority were ascertained to have foundation.

The demands of the seamen were so reasonable, the sympathy of the nation was, on the whole, so evident, the best officers in the navy so clearly realised reform was necessary, and the position of the country robbed of its right arm, the fleet, was so perilous, that the admiralty granted the petition and a free pardon to all that had been concerned in the mutiny. The movement had rapidly spread from Spithead to Plymouth, the Nore and the North Sea fleet. But,

though the petition was granted, it was not acted upon at once. Parliament did not immediately vote the sums required for the increase in pay and in the allowance of provisions. Short weight of meat and cheese was still served out. The men, distrustful and irritated at the delay, began to think they were being trifled with. At the end of April and early in May, 1797, there was an alarming recrudescence of the mutiny. Several ships belonging to Duncan's fleet were at the Nore ; and on May 2 four of these hoisted the red flag, sent many of their officers ashore, and anchored across the river Thames, where they began a quasi-blockade of the port of London. At Yarmouth, where the rest of the North Sea fleet was lying, it will be seen that there was further trouble.

From this day dates the mutiny at the Nore, which was a far more dangerous affair than the original Spithead mutiny. The ships concerned in it

66 ADAM DUNCAN

were, with few exceptions, units in Duncan's fleet. The men composing their crews had been hurriedly scraped together, were strange to their officers and to discipline, and included many educated persons amongst their number, who would naturally feel and resent the brutalities of the service more than the rough hands from the merchant service. They were for these reasons more prone to insubordination and readier to go to extreme lengths when mutiny showed itself. On April 30 there was an outbreak in Duncan's own flagship, the *Venerable*, then lying in Yarmouth Roads. Her crew assembled on the forecastle and in the shrouds, and suddenly gave three cheers. The *Nassau* at once followed her example. Duncan, in the *Venerable*, acted with the most admirable tact and firmness. He mustered the officers. The marines—who rarely or never made common cause with the seamen, and who, even to-day,

fraternise rather with the stoker than the blue jacket proper, so enduring are service traditions of hostility — fell in under arms. Then he went forward among the mutineers. His noble and splendid appearance, his known affection for and sympathy with the common seaman, and the simple eloquence with which he appealed to every great motive in his men had great influence with them. He refused to permit his admiral's flag to be lowered and replaced by the red standard of revolt. He was ready, too, to go to extremes ; for it was with difficulty that his chaplain restrained him from cutting down an insolent mutineer on the spot. Five ring-leaders were seized and brought aft to him on the quarter-deck, in the presence of the whole crew. He sternly rebuked them, showed them the wickedness of mutiny at such an hour, and then pardoned them.

Most admirals of the day would have

court-martialled them and hanged them, or at least have taken care that they were flogged within an inch of their lives. Accordingly, Duncan has been censured for his mildness. But so strong and so deep was the current of mutiny that violent repression at this juncture was altogether inexpedient and impossible.* Nor was this generous humanity fruitless. Through the trials of May and early June the *Venerable's* crew stood by their admiral, and, so doing, rendered the greatest of services to their country. After generations cannot indorse the attacks made upon Duncan in his own time. Rather, he seems in his deep sympathy with his

* An attempt at a court-martial on a mutinous seaman led to the great outbreak of May 12 at the Nore. Because at a later date Lord St. Vincent was able by the exercise of extreme severity to stamp out the mutinous spirit in the Mediterranean fleet, it by no means follows that similar measures would have had a like result in the North Sea fleet.

men and tenderness for them, and in his aversion to savage punishment, to have been ahead of his age,—ahead of such great admirals as Hood and Jervis and even Nelson.

In the *Nassau* the mutiny was temporarily got under. It may be noted that an address of this ship's company sheds light upon the maladministration which produced the mutiny. It states that nineteen months' wages were due, and that the seamen were "in want of almost every article of wearing apparel that may conduce to render our lives comfortable in this situation of life." A few days later the *Standard* rose, but by expostulation was recalled to loyalty. To stem the tide of insubordination, Duncan made the circuit of his ships, going on board each, addressing the crew, and examining into grievances. Of the speeches which he delivered, only one remains, addressed to the crew of the *Venerable*; and, as it illustrates the ad-

miral's character, the most striking passages in it deserve repetition;—

My lads, surrounded as Britain is with enemies, still we have nothing to fear if the fleet strictly adheres to its former character, which never shone with more brightness than during this war. . . . The regard we owe our country and our families, I think, should animate us to exert ourselves in a particular manner, and not flinch at the appearance of danger. You see me now grown gray with fifty-one years' service. In every ship I have had the honour to command I have endeavoured to do justice both to the public and the men I commanded, and have often been flattered with particular marks of their regard; and I still hope, in spite of all that has happened, this ship's company have not lost their confidence in me. Both my officers and I are always ready to redress any supposed grievances, when asked in a proper manner.

In all my service I have maintained my authority, which I will not easily part with. I shall take this opportunity of mentioning a thing that has too often offended my ears in this ship. I mean the profane oaths, and I will say blasphemy, that too much prevails,—I really believe often without meaning. But, if there is a God,—and everything round us shows it,—we ought to pay Him more respect. In the day of

trouble the most abandoned are generally the first to cry for assistance and relief to that God Whose name they are daily taking in vain. With what confidence they expect it, they know best. I am always happy to see you cheerful and at play, but the noise and tumult that seems at that time to prevail amongst you looks more like a lawless set of men than a well-disposed ship's company.

I hope you will attend to this; and, if what I have said makes any impression, I shall expect to see it by much alertness in doing your duty and in obedience to your officers. God bless you all; and may He always have us under His gracious protection and make us better men!

The men are said to have been deeply moved—some even to tears—by this noble appeal. They responded with a letter from the ship's company, protesting their sorrow at what had happened, asking the admiral—who, as they said, had proved to them a father—for his pardon, assuring him of their future obedience and promising that they would fight to the last if laid alongside the enemy. Nor were these idle words. The *Venerable's* crew in the weeks that followed

identified themselves with one of the most heroic deeds that stand in the brilliant records of the British navy, and finally effaced the stain of April 30 by their surpassing devotion.

Yet there were more outbreaks in the fleet. On May 3, in the House of Lords, the Duke of Bedford made a speech, which under the circumstances can only be described as a wicked one, suggesting that the government was not going to carry out its promises to the seamen ; and an injudicious order was issued about the same time by the admiralty, urging upon captains that the strictest discipline should be maintained, and that at the smallest show of mutiny the ringleaders should be seized and brought to punishment. There was at once a fresh outbreak at Portsmouth. At the Nore the ships, which had for a week been passably obedient, rose again on May 12 ; and on the 13th, at Yarmouth, the *Adamant* mutinied. In conformity with his custom,

Duncan went on board, and addressed the crew. He told them that he did not care a rap for any violence they purposed against him, and that, though he preferred to be loved rather than feared, he would with his own hand kill any one who showed himself insubordinate. Towering head and shoulders above them, he turned to them, and asked if any man dared to challenge his authority. A man did venture to do so, when Duncan, whose enormous strength was famous, seized him by the scruff of the neck and held him with one arm, dangling over the ship's side, while he bade the crew look at the fellow who would depose him from his command. His manhood, his words, his assertion of his physical advantage, weighed with the men. The *Adamant* returned to obedience, and afterwards shared the *Venerable's* glory.

Meantime at the Nore the state of things grew worse and worse. The

Sandwich, Inflexible, Director, Champion, Brilliant, Inspector, Proserpine, Calypso, Swan, and Tysiphone had all hoisted the red flag, reeved ropes to the yard-arms (to hang seamen who did not support the mutiny), elected committees, and sent objectionable officers on shore. Richard Parker, who had served in the navy as a midshipman in the opening year of the war, and who had been degraded to the ranks for insubordination took the lead. Delegates were despatched by him to Yarmouth to stir up Duncan's crews, and to Portsmouth; while day by day the revolted seamen paraded the streets of Sheerness, with bands playing and coloured papers in their hats, bearing the inscription, "Success to the delegates of the fleet." They threatened to renew the blockade of the port of London, if their demands were not complied with ; and the government was absolutely helpless, for it had no naval force upon which it could rely to send

against them. Even the soldiers and the militia were not altogether to be trusted. Seditious proclamations were one fine morning found posted up in the most important barracks of the kingdom. How critical was the situation was shown by the price of consols, which in May never rose above 49 $\frac{1}{4}$, and were seldom above 48 $\frac{1}{2}$. A monetary crisis added to the general embarrassment and alarm. And, although the news of Jervis's victory over the Spaniards at St. Vincent had come in opportunely to cheer the spirit of the nation, there was the gravest fear as to the issue of the twofold struggle, with the mutinous fleet at home and with the enemy abroad.

The Nore mutineers' demands went far beyond those of the Spithead mutineers. Over and above all the concessions made to the latter, they required that liberty should be given as a matter of right to every man in rotation, when

ships came into port ; that unpopular officers should not be employed again in the same ship, without the consent of the company ; that all who had deserted should be pardoned ; that prize money should be more equally divided ; and that the articles of war should be recast, and deprived of such clauses as were likely to inspire “terror and prejudice against His Majesty’s service.” They also required the admiralty board to come down to Sheerness, and confer with them. Fortunately, on May 16 the Channel fleet had returned to something like order, though for some weeks longer discipline could not be vigorously enforced. This fact strengthened the admiralty’s hands. With some exceptions the demands were refused. Troops and militia were poured into Sheerness. The guns at Tilbury were manned, and the furnaces for hot shot kept in heat, in case the mutineers should make a dash at London. A gen-

eral exodus from Sheerness began, and shops were closed in apprehension of a conflict. There was actual firing at Tilbury upon a boat-load of mutineers ; and the boom of the guns was heard in London,—the first shots fired in anger near the capital since the day when the Dutch sailed up the Medway and attacked Chatham.

On receiving the reply, the mutineers proceeded at once to action. A line of ships was moored across the Thames, and no vessel was permitted to pass it. The close blockade of London began,—a measure infinitely dangerous to the capital at a time when communications by land were slow and difficult, before the railway and canal system had been developed, and when London depended upon the sea for its coal and innumerable other supplies.

In great alarm the admiralty questioned Duncan as to whether his fleet could be trusted to act against the muti-

neers. The answer could not be doubtful. Even if the North Sea fleet could be persuaded to put to sea against the Dutch,—which was at least questionable,—it could certainly not be induced to act against the revolted sailors, who were its crews' own countrymen and friends. Moreover, day by day there were fresh symptoms of mutiny. The *Trent* refused to weigh anchor, when ordered; and, though the crew of the *Venerable* offered to “chastise” her, probably any such action would have been prevented by the other ships. Accordingly, Duncan pointed out to the authorities “the disagreeable jealousy from all other parts of the fleet” which any attempt at coercion by his squadron must bring upon his men, though he stated himself ready to execute orders, if given, and could express complete reliance upon his own *Venerable*. Her crew, indeed, had once more sent him an address, protesting their devotion:—

We will not [it said], as long as life will permit, in any respect see either you or the flag insulted.... While life remains in our bodies, we will endeavour always to comply with your wish and obey your command; and, if necessity require, you may depend on it we shall give you a sufficient proof thereof.... It would appear unnatural for us to unsheathe the sword against our brethren, notwithstanding we would wish to show ourselves like men in behalf of our commander, should necessity arise.

The admiralty decided not to test so severely the North Sea fleet. But its services were now required in another direction, as news arrived from the Texel that the Dutch fleet, with eighteen ships of the line, twenty-two frigates and sloops, and forty-two transports, was on the eve of putting to sea, to attempt the invasion of England. It had doubtless been emboldened by the mutiny, which by paralysing the British fleet had given the best of openings to the enemy, and expected to be unopposed.

Duncan was directed to put to sea from Yarmouth, and to proceed at once

off the Texel, and there remain so long as the wind blew from the east. But, when he issued orders to weigh, the *Nassau* and *Standard* refused to obey. At this juncture arrived fresh and contradictory instructions for Duncan with his ships, or such as he could trust, to prepare for an attack upon the mutineers at the Nore, and to place his squadron in a convenient position for that purpose. The order was dated May 27, 1797 ; but it was so much waste paper. It must have reached Duncan on the 28th. By noon on the 29th he was left with only his own *Venerable*, the *Adamant*, *Agamemnon*, and *Glatton*. An hour later the *Agamemnon* and *Glatton*, though the former's ship's crew had served loyally and brilliantly under Nelson in other and happier days, and though the latter's men had a remarkably good character, abandoned him. Thus the admiral was deserted by his fleet, and from twelve sail of the line saw his force reduced to two. Far from

being ready to fight the Nore mutineers, the revolted ships in the North Sea fleet were prepared to fire upon the *Venerable* and upon the admiral's flag.

The mutineers of the North Sea fleet assembled at Yarmouth, and took counsel as to what they should do. It was finally decided that four of the ships should proceed to the Nore, and re-enforce the mutineers at that anchorage. A fifth had gone off before this decision was arrived at, of her own accord. At this very moment the wind showed an inclination to come round to the east, thus rendering it imperative for the Dutch fleet and army of invasion to be closely watched. Strong appeals were made to the mutineers, but in vain. In this extremity the heads of the admiralty went down to Sheerness to try if any expostulation could prevail upon the men at the Nore to return to their duty. They were met with impossible demands. There was talk among the mutineers of a "Float-

ing Republic," and Parker had assumed the style of "President." When the rest of the North Sea fleet began to come in, the tone of the rebels rose. Parker had now twenty-four sail under his orders,—a most formidable force. Effigies of William Pitt, the prime minister, were strung up at the yard-arm of several ships, which led the London press to report that the mutineers were taking the lives of their officers, and greatly increased the universal terror. Several midshipmen and surgeons who had become especial objects of dislike to the crews were ducked,—dropped, that is to say, from the yard-arm, tied hand and foot, into the sea, and only hauled out when at the last gasp. In short, there was a dangerous outbreak of violence against the officers. At the other end of England a great conspiracy was detected among the marines at Plymouth, and no less than one hundred and fifty men were found to have been sworn in.

Yet at this juncture the nation was saved by the firmness of the government and by the heroism of Duncan. However just in the first instance the demands of the mutineers, however inexpedient the delay in acceding to them, matters had reached a pitch where further concession was impossible and where severity was absolutely essential, if the navy and the nation were to survive. All supplies were cut off from the mutineers; and a royal proclamation was issued, forbidding any intercourse with them. Thirty thousand troops assembled in arms between Dover and Gravesend. All seamen who ventured ashore were arrested. The buoys and beacons in the Thames mouth were removed, to prevent the escape of the ships to the enemy. For there was talk amongst the most extreme of the mutineers of carrying over the fleet to the enemy. Already, however, a more moderate party was showing itself among the men.

Many of them — indeed, the great majority — had never had any intention of going to extreme lengths, and viewed the suggestion of treason with horror.

Meanwhile Duncan, with the *Venerable*, *Adamant*, and three small vessels, had proceeded to the Texel. Inside the port lay ninety-five hostile ships, fourteen of the line ; but this great seaman was not of a temper to shrink from confronting such odds. His second in command, whose gallantry at Camperdown afterwards proved him a man of no common courage, urged him to retire to Leith for safety. Duncan met this counsel with a smile. Never did admiral show greater audacity and decision than he, in this supreme hour of his country's fate. He sent for the captain of the *Adamant*, and instructed him to fight her, side by side with the *Venerable*, till both ships went down. The spirit which burnt in him he infused into his men. He summoned the crew

of the *Venerable*, and told them, in his plain heroic style, what he expected of them. The *Venerable* was to hold her post off the Texel, whether the Dutch fleet came out or not. If they came out, the water was shallow enough to suffer her flag to fly above its surface after she had been sunk. If she survived, he would call upon his crew to act against the Nore mutineers.

The crew stood by him. They soared to his height of devotion, and answered that they would obey. And so for three days, while the wind blew from the east, this miraculous Scotsman kept his battleship moored at the entrance to the channel, at a point so narrow that no vessel could pass, and made signals to the *Adamant* in the offing, which passed them on in turn to a mythical fleet, out of the Dutchmen's sight. To bewilder and deceive the enemy, he tried every stratagem. Now the *Venerable* and *Adamant* flew admiral's flags. Next day

they passed from the lofty estate of flagships to the humbler position of ordinary captain's commands. Now one admiral's flag was of the blue and now of the red, to give the impression that a half-dozen of flag-officers and a score of battleships were off the port. As it was the usual British custom to keep the bulk of the blockading force at some distance from the blockaded port and only one or two ships close in, this device succeeded brilliantly. The Dutch were convinced that a strong fleet was still off the Texel, notwithstanding the mutiny. Thus the blockade was a triumph of skill as well as of courage.

He knew [says his biographer] the critical state of public affairs, that it required the most bold and decisive measures; and, whatever the result might have been, he determined to abide its issue.

What might not a leader so bold, so capable, so ready to face the extremest risks in his country's service, have

effected, in the flower of his age, in the terrible days of the American war, when England vainly sought a great admiral ?

During these eventful hours, when the life of his country trembled in the balance, and any moment might have witnessed a furious attack upon his two battleships by overwhelming numbers, he delivered another of his famous addresses to his men, instinct, as are all his spoken words, with a spirit of lofty devotion : —

To be deserted by my fleet [he said] in the face of an enemy is a disgrace which, I believe, never before happened to a British admiral ; nor could I have supposed it possible, My greatest comfort under God is that I have been supported by the officers, seamen, and marines of this ship, for which, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, I request you to accept my sincere thanks. . . . May God, Who has thus far conducted you, continue to do so ; and may the British navy, the glory and support of our country, be restored to its wonted splendours and be, not only the bulwark of Britain, but the terror of the world. But this can only be effected by a strict adherence to our duty, and obedience ; and let us pray

that Almighty God may keep us in the right way of thinking. God bless you all !

Between the 5th and the 10th of June the crisis passed. Two fresh battleships joined Duncan on the first date. On the second, Sir Roger Curtis arrived with seven more. His men had returned to their duty, though on the way round from Spithead there was some trouble as to the short weight of meat, which, after all the dangers and crises of the two past months, was still issued with an indifference to results almost criminal. They all protested their loyalty and their abhorrence of "French principles." With eleven British ships of the line, Duncan had no fears. The Dutch had let slip the favourable moment. It is now known that their seamen also were mutinous for want of pay. The situation had been saved by Duncan's happy audacity.

At the Nore the conflict with the mutineers, after some days of great un-

certainty, issued in the complete triumph of authority. On June 5, it is true, the London *Oracle* noted that no less than one hundred and fifty colliers were lying in the Thames, detained by the mutineers; but already in the revolted fleet difficulties were beginning to arise as to provisions and water. The seamen of the Plymouth and Portsmouth ships plied the mutineers with proclamations calling upon them to return to their duty. Many of the Channel ships even went so far as to offer "to defend our king and country against domestic as well as foreign foes." The "Floating Republic," with its president, had more than a suggestion of French lawlessness about it, and was detestable even to the more liberally inclined Englishmen.

Under these circumstances the revolted fleet began to melt away. At its greatest strength it had mustered fourteen ships of the line, five frigates and seven small craft,—a truly formid-

able force. On June 9 several of the ships loosed their foretopsail, as if to put to sea. On this suddenly two ships of the line ran out from the rebel fleet, and under a heavy fire made for the shelter of the Sheerness batteries. One ran aground, and was for an hour cannonaded by the mutineers, but very half-heartedly, as only one man on board her was wounded, and little damage done. On the following days other vessels copied their example, and there were signs that the ringleaders meant to escape to France in a small ship.

The mouth of the Thames was, however, most vigilantly watched by cruisers ; and only about twenty were able to get away in boats, among whom were none of the most conspicuous men. On the 14th the *Sandwich* submitted. Parker asked her crew whether they would give the ship up or stand by the delegates and ringleaders. The crew wished not to be the last to surrender, and, as

they could see the mutinous fleet daily—indeed, hourly—diminishing, answered that the ship should be given up. Parker passed at once from the estate of “President of the Floating Republic” and acting rear-admiral of the rebels to that of a prisoner whose death could alone atone for his misdeeds. He was confined at once, then put in irons and sent ashore under a strong guard. A week later a court-martial met to try him. He behaved himself with dignity and courage, protested that he had taken command unwillingly and had throughout restrained the mutineers; and the general tendency of the evidence was that, though he was unquestionably guilty of mutiny, he had not been insolent to the officers or permitted insolence. He was sentenced to death, and was hanged on board the *Sandwich* on June 30.

On the eve of execution he wrote a dying confession, designed, it would

seem, to put a stop to the ill-treatment of seamen in the navy.

I am to die [he said] a martyr in the cause of humanity. I know the multitude thinks hard things of me, . . . but my conscience testifies that the part which I have acted among the seamen is right. . . . How could I indifferently stand by and behold some of the best of my fellow-creatures cruelly treated by the very worst? . . . I here solemnly declare that I was not an original mover in the disturbances. . . . I am the devoted scapegoat for the sins of many. . . . By the laws of war I acknowledge myself to be legally convicted; but by the laws of humanity (which should be the basis of all laws) I die illegally.

From first to last he denied that the mutineers had maintained any treasonable correspondence with France or with the revolutionary party in England, and after a close study of the records of the mutiny the writer is inclined to believe that he spoke the truth. At the execution his conduct made a deep impression on the officers. He met his fate like a man, with the words:—

I acknowledge the justice of the sentence under which I suffer, and hope my death may be deemed a sufficient atonement and save the lives of others.

Thus passed from this mortal stage a strangely interesting figure. The seamen, it is said, adored him to the last; and it is certain that he was no common man.

We may rest assured that the trouble would never have gone to serious lengths, had not the seamen had real and serious grievances. The risks for the leaders were very great, since any failure meant for them death or flogging with three hundred or five hundred lashes. It is satisfactory to note that no very bloody vengeance was wreaked upon the Nore and North Sea fleet mutineers. All the ringleaders, except the handful who had escaped, were seized and tried by court-martial, and a very large number sentenced to death. But only in a few cases was the sentence carried out.

The most notorious and the most forward of the prisoners were hanged. The others were detained in prison till the victory of Camperdown gave the looked-for opportunity of exercising mercy. It was recognised by all the best naval officers that there was a great deal to be said for the men. Duncan had in the past made repeated representations on their behalf to the admiralty,—not always, unfortunately, with success. “Looking, as he did, on the seamen as his children,” says his historian, Lord Camperdown, “he could not feel harshly towards them.” He had urged the establishment of a naval militia, from which men might be drafted into the navy, instead of the cruel and unfair press. He had also advised a more even distribution of prize money. But he was ahead of his time, and the navy had to wait a generation before these changes were made.

The mutiny, though suppressed in the

home squadrons, smouldered on in our foreign fleets. At the Cape, on the Mediterranean, in the West Indies, and on the Newfoundland station there were dangerous outbreaks. Many grievances still remained unredressed ; and so late as 1805, in the opinion of capable judges, the temper of the men was very bad, and another rising was apprehended. For various reasons it did not take place, but towards the close of the war the moral of the navy declined. There was much unpunished cruelty to the men on the part of officers, and, in return, some skulking in action by the men.

Duncan's services to his country in the time of the mutiny should never be forgotten. They are an even stronger claim upon the gratitude of posterity than the great victory of Camperdown, and at the time they were very justly commended by Pitt. It would seem that the bold blockade of the Texel saved England from invasion, since it is not

probable that the Dutch sailors would have refused to go out, had they seen that no British fleet was watching them ; and the consequences of the landing of a powerful invading force, commanded by such a general as Hoche, could not but have been most disastrous at a moment when England was divided and hesitating within and hard pressed without.

For many weeks after the mutiny had ended — all through the summer and autumn — the blockade of the Texel was continued by Duncan with unremitting vigilance and steadily increasing forces. A Franco-Dutch force of thirty-six thousand men was still waiting to cross the North Sea, but it was never given the chance. The idea of “corking up” the entrance to the harbour — an operation which, a century later, the Americans attempted at Santiago — was discussed between the admiral and Lord Spencer. But it was never carried out,— probably, we may guess, because the admiral

wanted to get the Dutchmen out and strike a decisive blow against them. In August a series of heavy gales began, which sorely tried the very indifferent vessels of the blockading fleet; yet Duncan still held steadily to his station, amidst the admiration of Europe. Not till September 26 did he put back to port, and then only under express orders to refit. The Dutch were known to have disembarked the troops. All danger of invasion had passed, and no one could have anticipated what did actually happen.

Off the Texel was left Captain Trollope, with the *Russell*, *Adamant*, and some small craft, to keep a watch on the enemy. Meanwhile Duncan's ships had, to some extent, to be scattered for repairs, which were needed after the gales. Three ships of the line were sent to the Nore, three more to other points. The rest filled up with stores at Yarmouth. They were engaged in this work when

early on the morning of October 9, 1797, a lugger came in, flying the signal that the Dutch fleet was at sea. This was indeed startling news. A number of the officers and men were on shore : the ships would necessarily be in great disorder ; but without a moment's hesitation or delay Duncan stood out, carrying with him eleven ships. Three more joined him in the afternoon, and he pushed for the Dutch coast to fight the decisive battle.

Precisely what motives led the Dutch government to order out its fleet at such a juncture is hard to decide. The expedition to Ireland had been seemingly abandoned. There was not much to be gained by fighting, and very much to be lost. It was certain that the Dutch ships after their long stay in harbour would be in no condition to face even a scratch British fleet, the units of which were inured to keeping the sea and accustomed to a close blockade of a diffi-

cult and dangerous coast. Nor had the Dutch the excuse of superior force. In number of ships of the line they were just equal to Duncan, deducting his vessels absent for repairs. In weight of metal they were heavily outclassed. Admiral de Winter, the Dutch commander-in-chief, had in vain protested against the folly and uselessness of a sortie. The only result of opposing rash action was that his courage was suspected. He was ordered to fight near the coast, if the enemy was inferior; if the enemy was slightly superior, he was to remember that Dutch admirals had often prevailed against odds; if much superior, he was to avoid action.

Accordingly, on October 7 his ships came out. They were seen at once by the daring British scouts, and word was immediately sent to Duncan at Yarmouth and to the admiralty. The British cruisers strove in every way to embarrass their enemy. They broke in

upon his gun signals with confusing signals of their own ; they hoisted flags as if communicating with a large British fleet to windward of them and out of sight of the Dutch ; and they gave ample evidence not only of courage, but of superb seamanship by the style in which they kept touch with the hostile force. They must have felt that this force was their prey, when they saw that there was much confusion in the Dutch fleet and that no real attempt was made to chase them off. De Winter stood slowly down the coast of the Netherlands, towards the mouth of the Maas,—as was suspected, but incorrectly, with the intention of proceeding to Brest and forming a junction with the French fleet.

Duncan was hurrying meanwhile to the Texel, with a gale behind him, to place himself in the line of the Dutch retreat. Thence he was moving southward, when on the morning of October 11 the masts of a cruiser came over the

horizon, with the signal of the enemy's approach flying. The day was dark and tempestuous. The wind blew in sudden squalls. At 9 A.M. the *Venerable* signalled to prepare for battle, the work of an hour or more in each ship, since the decks had to be cleared, the yards secured, and the guns cast loose and run out. A few minutes later the detached squadron formed its junction with the British fleet, raising the fighting strength to sixteen ships of the line, of which, however, nine were of small size. The names of the ships were as follows :—

74 guns.	<i>Venerable</i>	64 guns.	<i>Agincourt</i>
	<i>Monarch</i>		<i>Lancaster</i>
	<i>Russell</i>		<i>Ardent</i>
	<i>Montagu</i>		<i>Veteran</i>
	<i>Bedford</i>		<i>Director</i>
	<i>Powerful</i>		<i>Monmouth</i>
	<i>Triumph</i>	50 guns.	<i>Isis</i>
64 guns.	<i>Belliqueuse</i>		<i>Adamant</i>
	Frigates and small craft:	<i>Beaulieu</i> , 40 guns;	
	<i>Circe</i> , 28 guns;	<i>Martin</i> ; <i>Rose</i> ; <i>King George</i> ;	
	<i>Active</i> ; <i>Diligent</i> ; <i>Speculator</i> .		

At this date it was unusual for frig-

ates and small craft to fight in the line of battle. They commonly kept out of the contest, and were fired upon by neither side. It was their duty to repeat signals, tow disabled ships, secure beaten enemies, watch the hostile cruisers, and save life.

As the British fleet drew nearer, the Dutchmen came into full view. They had fifteen sail of the line and one frigate in line of battle, as follows :—

74	<i>Brutus</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	9
"	<i>Staten Generaal</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	6
"	<i>Vrijheid</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	5
72	<i>Jupiter</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	13
68	<i>Haarlem</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	14
"	<i>Cerberus</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	12
"	<i>Leijden</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	10
"	<i>Admiraal de Vries</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	4
"	<i>Gelijkheid</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1
64	<i>Wassenaar</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	7
"	<i>Hercules</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3
56	<i>Alkmaar</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	15
"	<i>Batavier</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	8
"	<i>Beschermer</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2
54	<i>Delft</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	16
44	<i>Mars</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	11

Figures after the ships show their place in the line.

Besides these were five frigates and five brigs. These smaller vessels were not in the line of battle, but were inside it, between it and the Dutch coast, placed so as to sweep with their broadsides the intervals in the line of battleships. From the British fleet the enemy bore south-west. The direction of his line of battle was, roughly, from south south-east to north north-west ; and he was moving northwards. The direction of the wind was generally north-west, veering northwards during the morning, so that the British fleet had the inestimable advantage of the weather gage, enabling it to compel battle and to determine the moment and the conditions of collision.

Duncan's fleet, being rather a scratch assemblage of indifferent ships than a homogeneous force, such as Nelson in 1798 led to such brilliant victory in the Mediterranean, could not be expected to manœuvre with machine-like precision. Some ships, which should

have been present, were missing : others had only recently joined ; and there was some confusion and uncertainty in the fleet itself as to the position of the various ships in the line of battle, due, without doubt, to the hurried departure from Yarmouth and the difficulty of communicating between the ships in tempestuous weather. In fighting quality the North Sea fleet stood high, because the valour of the war-trained officers and the skill of the practised seamen would necessarily make themselves felt in the combat. In fleet drill it was seemingly most indifferent, as we should anticipate where the units were constantly changing. Its order at the moment when the Dutch came into sight was very scattered. About 9.20 Duncan signalled to his ships to "form on the starboard line of bearing," which would bring all the battleships abreast into a single sloping line, the direction of which was, roughly, north-east and south-

west. This sloping line would be generally parallel to and heading towards the Dutch line. Advancing abreast of each other, the British ships would thus all simultaneously strike the Dutch line, and engage ship to ship in the old-fashioned way.

This line abreast was, however, for various reasons, never properly formed. The signal was seemingly not understood by some ships, as passing squalls of rain obscured the flag-hoists. Other ships, scattered by the haste of their advance, were not able to get into position before a slight change of course—steering more to the south—brought the line of bearing, such as it was, into a loose line ahead. At 10.15 Duncan issued a fresh order : the fleet was to give chase ; that is to say, the individual ships were absolved from all necessity of maintaining any formation, and were to chase the enemy as rapidly as they could. But, though this order was bold and judi-

cious, it would have the demerit of bringing isolated British ships into collision with the whole Dutch fleet ; and, when Duncan saw clearly that the Dutchmen were not running away, but only drifting slowly inshore, he took steps to concentrate his fleet. First, he directed the British rear to make more sail, and then the van to shorten sail. At 11.8 the British fleet was a second time ordered to form starboard line of bearing. It does not appear that this signal was generally acted upon. The fleet was in very scattered order, and probably many ships did not see the signal. The day was advancing. The Dutch were steadily drifting inshore upon the shallows ; and, these once reached, the British fleet could only close at the most terrible risk. Immediate action was necessary. No more time could be spent in getting the scattered fleet into a mathematically correct line of battle. At 11.25 Duncan signalled to his ships each to steer for and

engage an antagonist. Ten minutes later he directed Vice-Admiral Onslow, in command of the lee division, to attack the enemy's rear. Last of all, about a quarter to twelve, he directed the whole fleet to pass through the gaps in the enemy's line, and engage the enemy to leeward.

Hitherto on this dull October morning none of Duncan's signals or tactical ideas, so far as we can gather these from his signals, had risen far above mediocrity. Before this he is revealed only as a hard-fighting, bold, but commonplace sea officer; though by a curious accident, immediately after the order to the van to attack the enemy's rear, a signal had been hoisted by mistake in the flagship, directing the British weather or rear squadron to attack the enemy's centre. This order would have exactly anticipated the plan under which Trafalgar was fought eight years later. It may have contributed to the

decisiveness of the victory on the present occasion ; for, though hauled promptly down, it was seen elsewhere, and it is quite possible that among the rear ships were some that acted upon it. But the decision to pass through the Dutch line and engage the enemy to leeward was a magnificent inspiration. It was risky, of course, for the wind was blowing straight upon the dangerous coast of Camperdown, not far distant ; and disabled ships, of which there must be no few after a fierce battle with a stubborn enemy, would be in great danger. But, in Nelson's splendid words, "Nothing great can be achieved without risk" ; and Duncan's manœuvre would effectually deprive the Dutch of all chance of retreat. At the same time, in rough, squally weather there were distinct tactical advantages in engaging to leeward of an enemy, especially where, as in this case, the ships on both sides were small. The vessels to windward would find it

dangerous to open their lower-deck ports on the engaged side ; while the guns, on recoiling inward after firing, would be apt to run out again by force of gravity before they could be secured and loaded, thus slowing the rate of firing.

Duncan himself had been on deck since six o'clock. He showed all the sober elation of a commander who is certain of winning, but knows that the enemy will make a fierce fight. He afterwards told of the exhilaration he had felt at the superb sight of the two large fleets closing for battle. For himself he entertained no fears. His whole attention was riveted upon the giving of orders and the directing of the movements of his ship. As the *Venerable* bore down, he called his officers on deck,

and in their presence prostrated himself in prayer before the God of hosts, committing himself and them with the cause they sustained to His sovereign protection, his family to His care, his soul and body to His providence.

This simple and solemn act of devotion performed, he could leave the issue of life or death to God. The spirit of the fleet was excellent. As the ships neared the enemy, the crews cheered tumultuously. The weather was now dark and showery. The village of Camperdown showed through the rain squalls twelve miles off to the east south-east.

Exactly in what order the British fleet opened battle cannot be determined. As far as can be gathered from the logs of the vessels engaged and from Dutch and English accounts, a large group of British ships under Vice-Admiral Onslow first came into collision with the enemy. This group, led by the *Monarch*, attacked the Dutch rear. A second, led by Duncan in the *Venerable*, attacked the sixth ship from the Dutch van from a quarter to half an hour after the battle had begun in the Dutch rear. Duncan had the famous signal, "Engage more closely," flying; and it was needed, for, shameful

to relate, there was more than one British ship backward in entering the battle. In particular, the *Aigincourt*, Captain Williamson, attracted unenviable attention. She should have been at hand to support Duncan. Instead, however, of using every effort to get into action, her captain shortened sail and hovered out of effective range.

A little after half-past twelve Onslow, and some minutes later Duncan, struck the Dutch, passing through their line and engaging on both broadsides. The Dutch reserved their fire till the last moment, but then discharged two broadsides in rapid succession, with most deadly effect. It is probable that, when the line had been forced, the causes already noticed as likely to affect the action of the windward ships came into play and slowed the Dutch fire, as it is recorded that the British got off three shots to the Dutch one. The *Venerable* passed astern of the *Staten Generaal*, fly-

ing Rear-Admiral Storij's flag, wore, and engaged her. Duncan had picked as his antagonist the *Vrijheid* flagship of the Dutch commander-in-chief, Admiral de Winter, but was unable to close with her at once, as the *Staten Generaal* shot up into the gap through which he had intended to pass, and compelled his attention. The *Venerable* was some minutes very hard pressed, indeed. She had upon her hands the *Vrijheid*, *Staten Generaal*, and possibly the *Wassenaar*; while a Dutch frigate and a brig from time to time fired at her. In this hour of trial, Duncan's calm fortitude was an example to his officers and men. As the *Venerable* was going down to the battle, an officer inquired how many ships she was going to engage. "Really, sir," said Duncan, with the politest irony, "I cannot ascertain; but, when we have taken them, we will count them." It seems to have been a matter of honour in the British navy of that day not to

duck the head at the unnerving whiz of round-shot ; for there is a story of his gently reminding a young midshipman of the entire uselessness of that instinctive act.

The *Venerable* once in the midst of the press of enemy's ships, the battle was for her a mere question of endurance and hard pounding. The Dutch seamen fought admirably,—so admirably that her position was for an hour a very critical one. The absence of the *Aigincourt* and other ships which should have been at hand to give her support made her task all the more difficult, and greatly increased the danger. The *Belli-queuse*, however, commanded by a fiery Scotch captain, Inglis, had now engaged the *Wassenaar* astern. The little *Ardent* had bravely closed with the far larger *Vrijheid* ahead, and was suffering severely. In quick succession her gallant captain, Burges,—whose monument with amazing want of patriotism the authori-

ties of St. Paul's recently endeavoured to remove from its conspicuous position in the cathedral, to make way for an artist, — and her master were struck down : her crew was decimated twice over ; yet, in the fierce excitement on the bloody decks, even women went to the guns. So sustained and so desperate was the contest in the centre that it was not till the British ships of Admiral Onslow's division, fresh from their victory over the Dutch rear, began to arrive that the enemy in the centre was battered to pieces and compelled to surrender.

In the rear, by a lucky chapter of accidents, Onslow's whole division concentrated upon the four last Dutch ships. So crushing and effective was this concentration that the conflict in this direction was quickly terminated. At half-past one the Dutch *Jupiter* struck, and her example was speedily followed by others. The *Aigincourt* had attached herself to Onslow's division,— whether or not

she properly belonged to it is uncertain ; and she, now the fight was won, fired into one of the surrendered ships in an attempt to show her prowess without incurring any serious risk. But others of the division, with a correcter instinct of what was required of them, moved forward up the Dutch line towards the furious battle which was still raging in the centre. Captain Bligh, of the *Director*, in particular, a harsh and tyrannical but most capable officer, deserves especial praise for the tactical insight which led him to press forward to his commander-in-chief's assistance at the earliest possible opportunity. His example was followed by the *Powerful*, and after some hesitation by the *Montagu*. The arrival of this formidable re-enforcement at once produced a decisive effect. The *Director*, though hotly engaged, and the *Montagu* had suffered very slight loss. The *Director* placed herself upon the port quarter of the *Vrijheid*, some twenty

yards off, and poured in upon the Dutch flag-ship a most appalling fire. The dreadful hail of iron which was now raining upon the Dutchmen from not one, but three or four British ships, thus reversing the situation earlier in the afternoon, did its work Foretopgallantmast, foretopmast, foremast, maintopgallantmast, maintopmast, mainmast, and, last of all, the mizzenmast came crashing down in quick succession. And it was time. The *Ardent* was already an unmanageable wreck, with one-third of her complement dead or disabled. She still fired desperately ; yet, save for this seasonable succour, her peril must have been extreme, since the Dutch ships were executing against her that very concentration which the British van had employed so profitably against their rear.

The *Venerable*, too, had lost heavily. All her masts were gravely wounded. Forty-five shot had hulled her betwixt wind and water. The pumps could

scarcely keep the inflow under. But her men were inspirited by the sight of the Dutch flags fluttering down in the rear, and greeted each surrender with cheers. As for her admiral, as a seaman who went through the battle by his side wrote of him, "He was heart of oak ; . . . and, as to a broadside, it only made the old cock young again." He and the pilot were the only men untouched upon the *Venerable's* quarter-deck. When the maintopgallantmast of the British flagship, with the colours, was shot away, a seaman named Crawford went aloft, and nailed a fresh flag to the mast. While engaged in this, a shot struck the mast and drove a splinter right through his cheek, necessarily inflicting great pain. Yet he came down amongst his cheering fellow-seamen with the brave words, "Never mind : that's naught." In this spirit the crew took the punishment which the enemy inflicted. For a close action the *Venera-*

ble's battle was unusually protracted. She was fiercely engaged for two to two and a half hours, though experience against the French had shown that their ships rarely resisted a fierce battering for more than an hour. But the Dutch were better seamen, more skilful gunners, and more obstinate fighters than their allies.

Some moments of terrible anxiety were caused the other British ships, when a Dutch sixty-four, the *Hercules*, close to the *Venerable*, took fire. She was at first mistaken for the British flagship. The fire, however, was quickly got under, and the mistake recognised. In the *Staten Generaal* a fire also broke out, but was extinguished. Towards three this ship retreated from the line in a state of dreadful confusion, with her rigging and sails shot to pieces, and unable to work her guns. The *Vrijheid*, as we have seen, was in as bad or even worse a case. Not a single officer re-

mained unwounded. The captain had received a mortal injury. All her colours and all her masts had been shot away. She floated on the surface of the sea, a mere disabled target. At last, about three or soon after, she surrendered to a hail from the *Montagu*; and with her fall the battle ended. The firing died away along the line, and it was possible to reckon the harvest of victory.

Of the sixteen ships which had formed the Dutch line of battle, nine had struck. Of the others, one or two at the earliest opportunity had bolted. In this ignominious category was the *Besschermer*. Further, two frigates were captured. In all, seven Dutch ships of the line—including the *Mars*, which was, strictly speaking, a frigate—escaped; but most of them were sadly knocked about, and in none of them was there any fight left. The battle was decisive in that it destroyed the Dutch navy. Never again did this force cause

serious uneasiness. More than one-half of the enemy's ships in line were taken, though these were in such a wretched plight, riddled and dismasted, that they were worthless as prizes. On the British side no ship was lost ; but the *Ardent* was so much knocked about that she was flying signals of distress, and all the others were badly wounded in their hulls. It was noted as evidence of the Dutch seamen's good gunnery that the *Monarch*, which led into battle, showed no trace of damage in her masts and sails. Her injuries were all concentrated in her hull.

To pursue the remnants of the Dutch was, after such a fierce battle, virtually impossible. Signals of distress were flying from the captured ships in all directions, and these humanity could not wholly disregard. Nor were there many British ships in a condition to pursue. The afternoon was closing in, the lee shore was very near at hand, soundings

showed only nine fathoms, and the wind was rising with heavy showers of rain. What remained of daylight was therefore employed in securing and patching up the prizes, putting the British ships in order, and getting a good offing.

The force and the losses of the two combatants may thus be reckoned :—

	<i>British.</i>	<i>Dutch.</i>
Ships	16	16
Broadside { guns	575	517
lbs.	11,501	9,857
Men	8,000	7,157
Loss	1,040	1,160

The loss of life on either side was great. Among the prisoners were three Dutch admirals, including the commander-in-chief, the heroic De Winter, as tall of stature as Duncan himself.

The victory of Camperdown was the most decisive that a British fleet had won since the days of the Seven Years' War. It was greater in its results than the 1st of June, 1794, which was, indeed,

if the truth be told, a very insignificant success. With twenty-six British against twenty-six French ships, Howe only made six prizes, and altogether failed to deal a smashing blow. In the battle of St. Vincent, which was fought eight months before Camperdown, a British fleet of fifteen sail captured four sail of a Spanish fleet of twenty-seven. The odds in this latter case may appear to have been far greater than those encountered by Duncan at Camperdown. But in all probability they were less, since the Spanish seamen and admirals were notoriously incapable, while the Dutch have always been terrible enemies. What added to the lustre of the victory at Camperdown was the boldness with which it had been snatched by Duncan's daring manœuvre of interposing his ships between the Dutch line and the shore.

A short message had been despatched to England by Duncan at the moment

when the *Vrijheid* struck and victory was assured. The tidings were received with the utmost joy and relief; for there had been very general uneasiness lest the Dutch should avoid a battle and get back to port, and perhaps some fear lest the recent mutiny in the fleet should have affected its efficiency as a fighting machine. On October 14, when the news reached London, the church bells pealed, the Tower guns fired salutes, and the streets were illuminated. Four days later, when the full despatches arrived, there were fresh illuminations and fresh manifestations of joy. Duncan was at once created a peer with the title of Viscount Duncan of Camperdown. His gallant vice-admiral, Onslow, was made a baronet. Most grateful of all, perhaps, both to the admiral and the fleet he led, was the pardon of one hundred and eighty of the unhappy mutineers. Duncan in person presented their petition, and he had the satisfa-

tion of reflecting that his skill and valour had saved from death or scourging men whom he pitied rather than blamed. Gold medals were struck to commemorate the success, Parliament voted its thanks, and at the public expense a monument was erected to the memory of Captain Burges, who had died the hero's death for his country.

As showing the general feeling of gratitude to Duncan in England, this letter from Lady Spencer, the wife of the first lord of the admiralty, may be quoted :—

What shall I say to you, my dear and victorious Admiral? Where shall I find words to convey to you the slightest idea of the enthusiasm created by your glorious, splendid, and memorable achievements? Not in the English language; and no other is worthy of being used upon so truly British an exploit. As an English woman, as an Irish woman, as Lord Spencer's wife, I cannot express to you my grateful feelings. But amongst the number of delightful sensations which crowd upon me since Friday last, surprise is not included. The man who

has struggled thro' all the difficulties of everlasting N. Sea Cruizes, of hardships of every kind, of storms, of cold, of perpetual disappointments, without a murmur, without a regret, and lastly who most unprecedently braved an enemy's fleet of sixteen or twenty sail of the line, with only two Men of War in a state of mutiny to oppose them: *That Man*, acquiring the honour and glory you have done on the 11th of October, did not surprize me. But greatly have you been rewarded for your past sufferings. Never will a fairer fame descend to posterity than yours, and the gratitude of a great nation must give you feelings which will thaw away all that remains of your Northern mists and miseries. God, Who allowed you to reap so glorious an harvest of honour and glory, Who rewarded your well borne toils by such extraordinary success, keep you safe and well to enjoy for many years the fame He enabled you to acquire on this most distinguished occasion.

Ever yours with gratitude and esteem,

LAVINIA SPENCER.

As one of Duncan's aunts in writing to Dundas put it, the victory was all the more valuable and opportune, since the nation was "in a chicken-hearted way, low-spirited by the war, murmuring at

taxes (though necessary), grumbling and dissatisfied in every county."

In December a royal procession to St. Paul's took place, to give thanks for the three great naval victories of the war. Duncan was present in person ; and with the two wagons conveying the French and Spanish flags taken in the war went a third, with the Dutch flags captured by his skill at Camperdown.

Of the three Dutch admirals who were taken in the battle, De Winter, the commander-in-chief, was received on board the *Venerable*. He had, as the Irish rebel, Wolfe Tone, who was present in Holland with the army of invasion, put it, defended himself like a lion, and displayed unusual courage and obstinacy. Duncan received him with the most delicate kindness, praising him for his gallantry in words which must have come as balm to heal the anguish of defeat. Throughout De Winter had played the man and the patriot. He had warned

his government of the utter folly of fighting, and could at best feel that the disaster was none of his work. But he felt just indignation at the ignominious manner in which certain of his ships had fled from the line of battle, and, in his reports to the naval committee which managed or mismanaged the affairs of the Dutch fleet, adverted strongly to this point. There is a story that he asked Duncan at table whether this defection had not been the chief cause of his defeat,—a question which Duncan is said to have dexterously and wisely evaded. It was none of his business to contribute to the removal of the cowardly or incapable captains in the Dutch fleet.

De Winter was taken to London, where he was kindly received, and where he won the golden opinion of all. His wife being dangerously ill, he was, a month after the battle, sent back on parole to his country. There he was acquitted of all blame for the defeat, and

declared to have gloriously supported the honour of his flag. He remained the firm friend of Duncan, and maintained a correspondence with him long after his release. The last letter of his which remains expresses an ardent desire for an honourable peace between England and Holland. But this was not to be. So long as Holland remained under the heel of her French conqueror, which was until the events of 1813 issued in the general overthrow of the French, so long she had of necessity to be counted by England as an adversary.

There was one unpleasant episode after the battle. Captain Williamson of the *Agincourt* was tried by court-martial at Sheerness for his conduct in the action. The charges against him were two : the first, of disobedience to the signals and not going into action ; the second, of cowardice or disaffection. The first charge was held to have been proved in part. The second and far

graver charge was considered not to have been proved. Williamson was sentenced to be placed at the bottom of the captains' list, and pronounced incapable of ever again serving in the navy. There seems to have been a strong feeling against him ; for Nelson wrote of the verdict that it was a most lenient one, and maintained that death was the proper penalty for such "gun-shyness" as the *Agincourt's* commander had displayed. Duncan is said to have refused to give evidence in his favour, with the words :—

For myself I do not care ; but how can I bring my ship's company [who had suffered sorely through want of the *Agincourt's* support] back to life ?

Through the winter of 1797–98 Duncan, from the bad state of his health and the fact that his services were no longer urgently required at sea, remained on shore. Early in 1798 he visited Dundee and Edinburgh, where he was splendidly

received. Not till the summer of that year did he again hoist his flag, on this occasion in the *Kent*, which had replaced the battered *Venerable*. He had now under his orders no less than sixteen British sail of the line with forty smaller craft, while a Russian squadron of ten sail of the line was also with him. This ample force watched the coast of Holland to prevent the despatch of any assistance to General Humbert, who with a small body of French troops had invaded Ireland. In November the British fleet returned to port, and Duncan went home on sick leave. As in the previous year, he spent the winter of 1798 ashore. In the summer of 1799 he once more returned to the blockade. The British government had now arranged with Russia for the despatch of a joint expedition of thirty thousand men to Holland. At the same time it was hoped that the remnants of the Dutch fleet might be induced to come over, as

the Dutch seamen were known to be very ill-disposed towards the Dutch government.

At this particular juncture the French Admiral Bruix with a large fleet escaped from Brest, and sailed into the Mediterranean. The position was a very dangerous one for the British squadrons, since they were scattered, and might have been overwhelmed and defeated in detail. Re-enforcements were hurried off from every quarter by the admiralty to the Mediterranean ; and, as usual, Duncan was stripped of his best ships. But Bruix did nothing at all. Having entered the Mediterranean, he left it again as soon as he could, without a decisive action, and returned to Brest. His aimless movements served only to puzzle the British strategists.

In August, 1799, the British expedition for Holland sailed. Duncan's health had now once more given way, but he clung bravely to his post. It must be re-

membered that he was now a very old man for active work, that his constitution had years before been broken in the West Indies, and that he had spent his early life in the navy in days when the sanitary conditions were fearful. These facts explain his constant enforced withdrawals from the fleet to recruit his health on shore. Nature was warning him that the time for his retirement had come.

When the British force, twelve thousand strong, under General Abercromby, arrived off the Dutch coast, it was decided to attack from the land side the Helder batteries which prevented access to the Texel anchorage, where lay the Dutch fleet. The weather, however, turned very stormy ; and it was impossible to land till August 27. On that day a considerable force occupied the Helder works without any resistance. Simultaneously, the Island of Texel was seized. The Dutch fleet was thereby

left at our mercy. Admiral Storij, who had escaped from Camperdown, and who was in command of it, was summoned to surrender by Admiral Mitchell, Duncan's second in command, and, as the Dutch seamen declined to fight, had no choice but to obey. One seventy-four, five sixty-eight's, two fifty-four's, two forty-four's, and two smaller vessels thus fell into British hands. This splendid success obtained, Duncan at once returned to England in very bad health. His service at sea was over ; for, though he once again returned to his fleet, he never got further than Yarmouth.

This bloodless capture of a large squadron was thus the close and consummation of Duncan's long service career. It covered him with fresh glory, and won yet more enthusiastic congratulations and thanks from the admiralty and from his friends. Yet, as his subordinate, Admiral Mitchell, had had the "entire management and direction of the expe-

dition," it would be unjust to him to attribute the great results which were obtained to Duncan, and to Duncan alone. The commander-in-chief had the wisdom and magnanimity to leave the conduct of affairs to an officer who was in good health, and who understood his work. It may be noted, as a matter of great credit to all concerned,—the two admirals and General Abercromby,—that there was no friction of any kind between the two services, but that they worked harmoniously together, and this at a time when discord was only too common.

In the end, as might have been expected, a crushing force was concentrated by the French and Dutch against the Anglo-Russian expedition. It was now commanded by the incompetent Duke of York, who had replaced the competent Abercromby. After two indecisive battles, in which there was great mismanagement upon the British

side, the expedition was compelled to evacuate Holland. But it had completed the work begun by the navy at Camperdown, and may be said to have finally destroyed the Dutch fleet.

On Duncan's return to England, some soreness was caused him by the refusal of the admiralty to promote the *Kent's* first lieutenant, Mr. Clay, whom he had sent home with despatches, whereas Admiral Mitchell's first lieutenant was immediately promoted. It should be said that it was the almost invariable practice, after a victory or a success such as this, to promote the commander-in-chief's first lieutenant; and not to do so was a distinct slight to Duncan. Moreover, Clay had other claims. He had been severely wounded at Camperdown, and had been awarded a pension as incapable of further service, though subsequently, on his recovery, this pension had been withdrawn. Duncan's letter was treated with disrespect by the

authorities, who returned no answer. Feeling that he had deserved something different from this, he was tempted to write very bitterly to the admiralty, and also, it would seem, suspended his friendly and confidential correspondence with Lord Spencer, the head of the admiralty.

Lord Spencer, however, was in no mood to quarrel with a man who had done his country such inestimable service. He wrote to Duncan in private a kindly and generous remonstrance, pointing out that "the proper and regular mode of conveying your wishes for the promotion of any officer is through me in a private communication." And at the earliest opportunity he promoted Clay. Thus the difference which had arisen between the two was healed.

Duncan had always held that duty commanded him to serve his country till the war was ended.

I cannot [he had written to a relative in 1796] bring myself to believe it will be right to think of retirement till the war is over, however comfortably I may think myself circumstanced. . . . Till you make a peace, there will be no rest for me.

But failing health and the completion of his work — perhaps also the feeling which he more than once expressed, that young commanders are better than old — were now working to make him reconsider his resolve. In the North Sea the war was practically over. All danger from Holland had ceased ; and now throughout the world the star of Britain was in the ascendant. Nelson's brilliant victory of the Nile in mid-1798 had thoroughly cowed the French navy. In March, 1800, Duncan finally decided to retire, and in April struck his flag on board the *Kent*, and departed to Scotland.

There in serenity and repose, with the consciousness of having rendered to his country true and faithful service, he spent the evening of a noble life. But

the spirit of self-sacrifice which burnt in him called him forth from his retirement early in 1801, when the Northern Coalition threatened England. He offered the admiralty his assistance ; but it was, perhaps wisely, declined by Lord Spencer, who reminded him that, however willing the spirit, the body could scarcely be trusted. Yet it is much to be wished that Duncan had been sent to Copenhagen, as Nelson's superior, in place of Sir Hyde Parker. He understood Nelson, and with him might have won a bloodless victory over the Danes ; while, as his conduct at the Helder showed, he was perfectly ready to give a capable subordinate the free rein which Sir Hyde Parker grudged.

Duncan continued for the most part at his Scotch home till in his seventy-third year, in July, 1804, when the position of his country was once more a critical one, he journeyed to London to offer for the last time his services. But, if the spirit

was willing, the body was now more than ever weak. He was attacked with illness, which made any command quite impossible, and on his return home died on August 4, 1804, near Coldstream. Thus he may be said almost to have fallen in harness, with one single thought in his heart—the service of his country—to the very last.

Thus ended a career of signal dignity and beauty,—a career in which there is nothing to censure and very much to praise. Unlike his greater contemporary, Nelson, Duncan was happy in his private life. No glaring scandal in his case estranged the sympathy of old friends. He cultivated a restraint which was lacking in the younger admiral. His modesty was not the least striking feature in his character, when success and praise flowed in upon him in full tide. “This Duncan,” it was said of him with absolute truth after all the rejoicings over Camperdown, “hath

borne his faculties so meekly!" Perhaps the country was accustomed to a breezy air of self-assertion in its admirals, and was surprised at his reticence and quiet. He courted no popularity,—not that a man is the worse for desiring the praise of his fellows: that is, at the worst, an honourable failing,—and he would probably not have countenanced those triumphal tours of Nelson which displeased the good taste of the fastidious not a little.

Yet there were times when he could fling his cloak of restraint aside. He assuredly was no starched lay figure in the hour of stress and battle, even if few of those wonderful touches are recorded of him which set Nelson above his contemporaries as a master in the art of appealing to the heart of the common seaman. Nothing better has ever been achieved by the navy which Duncan adorned than that magnificent blockade of the Texel with only two

ships ; and the terms of his assurance to his men that he meant to fight the *Venerable* till she sank at her moorings were in the very Nelson style,—great-hearted, bold, undaunted, with just a dash of the theatrical.

As an admiral, Duncan showed very high, if not the highest, capacity. What distinguishes his method of action from that of Nelson, whom posterity has pronounced the greatest seaman of all time, was that he never seems to have contemplated crushing a part of the enemy's force with the whole of his own. It was this method which at the Nile and Trafalgar brought such brilliant success ; but it is only fair to remember that at Copenhagen, where he was likely to encounter a peculiarly desperate resistance, Nelson departed from it,—it must be presumed with good reason. At Camperdown, through accident, and not through Duncan's dispositions, so far as these are recorded in the signal logs of

the flagship, a concentration of the British fleet upon a portion of the enemy did actually take place, and proved wonderfully effective. Duncan's orders, as given out by signals, were for "each ship to steer for and engage her opponent after passing through the Dutch line." It is clear, then, that he purposed a ship to ship battle. The fact, however, remains that he, like Nelson at Copenhagen, could rely upon a considerable preponderance of force, having sixty guns, or about twelve per cent. more than the Dutch, on the broadside, with an advantage of sixteen hundred and fifty pounds' weight of metal, or about one-sixth. It was generally held about this time that a preponderance of one-fourth in weight of metal gave absolute certainty of success. Now at the Nile and Trafalgar the British fleets were distinctly inferior in force, and were thus, in a manner, compelled to a concentration upon a detail of the en-

emy. Duncan may have considered that his superiority insured victory, and rendered the adoption of any such scheme unnecessary. He is known to have been a careful student of what works then existed on tactics, and it is not probable that he altogether overlooked the possibilities of a concentration. Desiring to destroy the whole Dutch fleet, and well aware that the proximity of the shoals and of the Dutch coast gave unusual facilities for escape, he may have desired to prevent what did actually happen,—the flight of several of the unengaged Dutch ships from the line. Moreover, with such a fleet as he commanded,—the units of which were, in many cases, strange to each other,—he may have feared the very grave danger which is always apt to arise when a concentration is effected upon a part of the enemy,—the risk of friend firing into friend, which has a very bad effect upon moral. So able

an officer as Saumarez objected to Nelson's plan of action at the Nile for this very reason. It is instructive to note that several logs of the British ships engaged at Camperdown recorded the fact of receiving shot from the misdirected guns of friends. The *Lancaster*'s log, indeed, shows that the fire discipline of that ship was bad, since we find the incident of her firing into the British *Isis* narrated, with the remark, "Ordered the people to cease firing, for that was one of our own ships, but could not stop them from firing." We may contrast this with the perfect discipline of the *Theseus* at the Nile.

We had not been many minutes in action with the *Spartiate* [says the *Theseus*'s captain], when we observed one of our ships place herself so directly opposite to us on the outside of her [the *Spartiate*] that I desisted firing on her, that I might not do mischief to friends.

With such ships and crews as this, the possibilities were infinitely greater than

with the odds and ends which formed the North Sea fleet.

Two other charges have been brought against Duncan. The first is that he changed his plan of action at the last minute. The signal logs and evidence taken at the *Agincourt* court-martial, which have been examined and published by Admiral Sturges Jackson, however, show conclusively that this was not the case. A signal hoisted by mistake in the *Venerable* led to the erroneous idea of such a change being entertained.

The second charge is that Duncan attacked with his fleet in great disorder. This fact seems from the logs to be undeniable, though it should be noted that the Dutch accounts speak distinctly of the British ships advancing *en échiquier*, or in a line of bearing, which was the formation ordered. The same charge has been brought against Nelson for the manner in which at Trafalgar he brought

his fleet into action. Observers at Cadiz upon that memorable morning watched with exultation, we are told in the *Naval Chronicle*, the approach of "the mad Englishmen *in confusion and disorder*." Yet the end and object of naval tactics is to crush the enemy, and there are times when true genius will brush aside the rules which are meant rather for the guidance than for the enslavement of leaders. The British fleet at Camperdown was in disorder from causes over which Duncan could have no control,—the gale that had been blowing and the vehement pursuit of the Dutch. To have delayed while a mathematically correct line was being formed would have given the Dutch time to reach the shoals. Far, then, from Duncan deserving censure for the manner of his attack, he merits the highest praise for refusing to be bound by pedantry and for daring to run the risks which were inseparable from such confusion.

In one respect the career of Duncan was most remarkable. It may be said, as a general rule, that few old commanders, whether on land or sea, have distinguished themselves. Nelson's whole brilliant career was compressed into the short term of forty-seven years. He was famous at the age of thirty-eight. But Duncan did not make for himself a place amongst our very greatest admirals until 1797, when he was sixty-five years old. He was sixty-six when the battle of Camperdown was fought. The sea service is more favourable to old commanders than the land, where greater physical fatigue must necessarily be encountered; and amongst the distinguished naval officers of the time were not a few who won their spurs in old age,—the most noteworthy, Howe and St. Vincent. Yet Howe showed a certain timidity in checking the British pursuit after the battle of June 1, and even St. Vincent in the great battle from which he took

his title showed a strange indifference to gathering in the full harvest of victory. "Few officers," it was said by Admiral Sir Richard Dundas, "are really good for much after fifty or fifty-five years of age." "No general over sixty years of age should be employed," said Napoleon. "At sixty one is good for nothing." Duncan is the most famous and by far the most brilliant exception to this sound generalization. At no point can it be said with justice that the work he did could have been better done by a younger man. In the great year of his command, 1797, he showed all the vigour, dash, and perseverance of youth.

This is all the more striking, inasmuch as in his old age his health was never good. But the iron will which ruled the body sustained him, and held in check all physical weakness till his task was performed.

In his treatment of his men, Duncan's tenderness and humanity have already

been noticed. The interests of the common seamen constantly engaged his attention, both before and after the great mutiny. He viewed with especial disfavour the press as a means of getting men, disliking, in all probability, its capriciousness. As Napoleon justly said, it spared the gentleman and carried off the common fellow, and was therefore grossly unjust. He was just as averse to the current practice of shipping for the navy jail-birds. It is true that in many cases these were minor offenders,—poachers and smugglers and ne'er-do-wells rather than hardened criminals; but the intermixture of such elements could not but have had a bad moral effect upon the other men. Amongst the suggestions found in the admiral's papers are many that have long since been carried out in the reformed navy of our own day. Pay to be regularly given, gratuities for long and excellent service, and more liberty are the chief

of these recommendations. In the great mutiny, under severe provocation, he countenanced no excessive severities; and probably one of the greatest pleasures which his victory at Camperdown brought him was the fact that it led to the pardoning of so many of the misguided mutineers. His feeling to the seamen was that they were his children, — wayward and disobedient children it might be at times, but still children, deserving his protection and love. That such an admiral in the supreme hour of battle could depend upon the devotion of those over whose interests he had so faithfully watched is only what we should expect. The wounded seaman in hospital after Camperdown, who met some stranger's invectives against admirals and wars with the words: "Only a leg! only a leg! Hurrah! Duncan forever!" was but a type of thousands more who purchased with their heroism, skill, and devotion to their chief and

country that great victory over the Dutch.

Amongst his private characteristics was his saintliness of life. Duncan was the model of the Christian admiral. The sustaining force of religion was with him through all the trials of war ; and, as His last act before going into action at Camperdown was to ask the Almighty for His protection, so his first act after battle was in the sight of all to offer up praise to the Higher Power Which had given him success. In such simple faith as his there is something inspiring and elevating. Yet, because he was a Christian in the truest sense of the term, he did not frown upon the joys of life. In private society he was a cheerful and excellent companion, welcome wherever he showed himself.

In dealing with his allies, the Russians, he displayed exceptional tact. No quarrel, hardly even a dispute, arose between him and the Russian com-

manders-in-chief. The management of an allied fleet is proverbially difficult ; and in this case it was certainly enhanced by the great weakness of the British squadron at the outset, and by the fact that Russia had little or nothing to gain by hazarding her ships to enable Great Britain to destroy the naval power of Holland. The moment the Anglo-Russian forces on land encountered resistance, quarrels began between the two allied armies, thus illustrating by a strong contrast Duncan's good management in maintaining such excellent relations at sea.

He died full of years and honours, leaving a name which will ever be cherished and esteemed by his countrymen. His retirement from active service, his modesty which avoided displays and demonstrations, and the critical state of the war did, indeed, cause his death to pass at the time almost unnoticed ; and afterwards, as has been pointed out al-

ready, the glory of his achievements was obscured by the greater brilliancy of Nelson's fame. But with a revived interest in the past of our navy his career has once more received attention. A *Duncan* and a *Venerable* figure amongst our newest and most formidable battle-ships. A *Camperdown* has for ten years done sterling service in the British fleet. It is well that our seamen of to-day should be reminded of such a figure. He should never be forgotten by them, whether in the hour of thought or action.

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To these must be added :—

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III. **ADMIRALS' DESPATCHES, NORTH SEA**, Volumes VI. and VII., in manuscript in the Public Record Office. Contain Duncan's official correspondence with the admiralty during the most eventful period of his command.

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